



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

The Only Publication authorized by the Hon. W. F. Cody ("BUFFALO BILL")

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 8.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S PRAIRIE POLICE

OR
THE DECOY OF DEATH DESERT



BY THE AUTHOR OF
"BUFFALO BILL"

"HANDS UP, KENO CAIN, THE DANITE!" CRIED BUFFALO BILL, SUDDENLY COVERING THE TRAITOR GUIDE.



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BUFFALO BILL'S PRAIRIE POLICE;

OR,

The Decoy of Death Desert.

A STORY OF THE OLD MORMON TRAIL.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

THE PRAIRIE POLICE.

The prairie police were down in Arizona to protect the settlements, the overland stage trails and the pony rider couriers, who were constantly facing death either from Indians or desperado bands.

It was in the days of Indian warfare upon the American frontier, where deeds of daring made records for the men in buckskin, and life was freely offered to win fame, or to save those who were helpless to aid themselves.

Along the far frontier a line of military police extended from Northern Utah, through the desert lands

of Arizona down into New Mexico, and the soldiers were the barrier between the hostile savages, the renegade white outlaws and the bold pioneers who dared to seek homes in the Land of the Setting Sun.

All that the soldiers could do they gladly did, from commandant to private, but those they had to meet and beat back were both Indians and outlaws, of a kind that had to be met upon their own ground, in their own style of desperate warfare—in truth, it was a case of "fighting the devil with fire."

The men who could do this were the plainsmen, mountaineers, wild Western hunters and the scouts of the army, those who were often border born, who could out-Indian the Indians at their own game and

meet the outlaws as they fought, with cunning and without mercy.

It was for this reason that bordermen were those who comprised the dashing band known as the Prairie Police, and chief of whom was the great King of Plainsmen, William F. Cody—Buffalo Bill.

It was from the Prairie Police that the pony riders, the stage drivers, scouts and guides were taken when any desperate deed was on hand.

The headquarters of the Rough Rider police was at a point some distance from Fort Wingate, not very far from the Grand Canyon and along the borders of the Arizona desert lands to be found in that country, so called upon account mostly of the lack of streams and springs, rather than of timber, for of the latter there is plenty.

But there was trouble in the stockade retreat of the Prairie Police, for their chief, who had taken upon himself to make a certain dangerous ride, in place of a wounded comrade, had not come in on time—in fact, he was hours late.

Such a thing generally meant death or disaster to the bold rider.

Certainly it must mean death to Buffalo Bill, a man always on time, and one whom death only could delay, his men believed.

The stockade headquarters was a stage station and a pony riders' relay, as well as the retreat of the Prairie Police.

There were the men of Buffalo Bill's band, the extra drivers, and pony riders, the stock tenders, and it was, if not a military post, one where the commandants of Wingate and other forts knew just where to send and get a scout, guide, driver or rider, or a force for a pursuit of Indians, or outlaws, if necessary.

Of late the desperado band known as the "Forty Thieves" had been more bold and troublesome than was their wont, and they had killed both drivers of the coaches and the riders and wounded others.

All knew that was the reason why Buffalo Bill had taken the trail, to see if he could discover some clew to a raid against the bold gang, whose strikes at the settlements and trails always caused an uneasy feeling on the part of the Indians and an earnest desire to follow their example.

Buffalo Bill, when he had on former occasions been delayed, generally showed that he had the best

of reasons, and it had often resulted in some personal triumph that added to his fame.

But now he was over half a dozen hours behind time, and the faces of one and all at the retreat began to grow serious.

Had he been shot from an ambush?

If not, what had delayed him?

Was he then lying badly wounded on the trail?

These were the questions asked over and over again, and yet no one could answer them.

It was known that Buffalo Bill was a "marked man," that the Forty Thieves had doomed him to die; but, somehow, he seemed always to bear a charmed life, for, while others went under, he escaped.

The leader of the Forty Thieves, "Captain Cruel," his men called him, had even put a price on the head of Buffalo Bill, whether taken dead or alive.

One rider had just come in, and along the trail that Buffalo Bill had been supposed to have taken.

Rio Grande Rob was his name, and he was as good a man as belonged to the outfit, and he hailed from Texas.

He seemed surprised when he learned that Buffalo Bill had taken the run and had not appeared after six hours of time overdue.

"I don't know what to think about the chief, for all was clear as I came along," said Rio Grande Rob.

"We can only hope he is O. K., Rob, but begin to dread the worst, and, you know, his orders are never to look him up as long as he is not a day late, though he is mighty quick to go to the aid of any one else," said Velvet Dick, the commander of the retreat, and whose gentle ways and soft voice had gained him the name, though he was a very devil when aroused.

"No, we must obey orders, or, at least, wait a while yet to hear from Wild Bill before sending out a patrol; but Buffalo Bill always escapes the traps set for him, so I've come to think he wasn't born to be downed either by Indians or outlaws, and will yet die in his bed as peacefully as a country parson," said Rio Grande Rob.

Then he suddenly added:

"But, see here, boys, I'm off duty for twenty-four hours, and I'll just ask leave and go back over the trail for a ride, seeing as I get so little exercise, and maybe I can pick up a clew; but if Chief Cody

comes in, don't give me away and say I was looking for him."

The men gave a cheer at Rio Grande Rob's bright idea, and, a few moments after, well-mounted and armed, the Texan was off on his secret mission to try and find some clew to Buffalo Bill's strange absence from the retreat.

CHAPTER II.

BUFFALO BILL SEES SIGNS.

As has been stated, Buffalo Bill had taken the place of a wounded rider, and had left the retreat, carrying the mail pouches.

He had determined to make the ride and get a chance to see just what the Forty Thieves were doing along the trails, for they had been getting so bold of late he was anxious to give them a lesson by striking a blow they would remember.

The scout chief was, as was usual with him, splendidly mounted and armed, and eyes and ears were open to face any danger that might threaten or discover anything that had a suspicious look.

He had not gone many miles before he discovered a party of horsemen in the distance.

He at once drew rein and raised a small field glass to his eyes.

"Some of my Prairie Police, patrolling the trail," he muttered, and, soon after, they came within hailing distance, and he called out:

"Hello, Dan, what's up?"

"There's been trouble along the trail, chief, and the station boss asked me to take some men and patrol along the line; but I have seen no signs of an outlaw or Injun."

"All right, Dan; but I'm on the watch this run myself for signs, and I'll report meeting you to the station boss," and, with this, Buffalo Bill rode on, the men giving him a hearty salute, for he was the idol of all in his command.

He had passed through Wolf Den Pass, a fatal spot in the past for the pony riders, and halted at what was known as Monument Rock, to give his horse a swallow of water at a brook that crossed the trail, when his eyes fell upon something that at once riveted his attention.

The brook ran through a pretty valley, heavily timbered, in fact, so dense was the undergrowth that the sun seldom penetrated there, and the spot was dark and somber.

Just across the brook in the center of the little valley was a rock that towered above the trees, coming up from the ground as though erected by man.

It was formed by nature into a shaft, and did, indeed, look like a monument.

And a monument it was, for in that valley a wagon train had once come to grief, the settlers having been murdered by the Indians, and long after the bones had been gathered and buried there.

At another time a company of cavalry and a band of Indians had fought fiercely in the valley, and the bodies of the dead, redskin and soldier alike, had been buried under the shadow of the rock.

Several pony riders also lay sleeping their last sleep close to its base, in the shade of the somber valley and with the waters of the brook murmuring a requiem to the dead.

But it was not the monument that the eyes of Buffalo Bill rested upon.

Nor was it the mound over the slain emigrants of the train, the graves of the soldiers or the redskins, or the little hills that marked where rested three dead comrades, shot down there by the Forty Thieves.

He had often gazed sadly upon them and wondered if he, too, was some day to fall by the way, shot down by ambushed outlaws.

What now caught his eye was a broad trail down through the little valley.

It was beyond the Monument Rock, and came from the southward and went northward.

It was a trail that was very fresh, and it was made not only by horses, but by wagons.

Quickly Buffalo Bill rode to it, and halted where it crossed the pony trail.

"It is the trail of a wagon train, and it has not passed here more than an hour or two.

"What does it mean?"

"Why, what can it mean, going in this direction, but that the guide is lost and is going straight up into the Indian country.

"This will never do, for a massacre will follow.

"It must be overtaken and turned back," and, wheeling up the valley, he went dashing along on the strange trail.

Buffalo Bill had heard of no emigrant train coming to that part of the West, and, in the face of the dangers to be encountered, he could not believe that settlers had intentionally sought that wild land,

especially in such small force as the tracks he was following showed them to be.

They might be Mormons, it was true, but then they must not be allowed to run into peril any more than any one else.

It was true that the Mormons were not at war with the Indians, or, to put it as it really was, the Indians did not war against the followers of Brigham Young, as they knew there was trouble between them and the Government.

But the Indians would not recognize a wagon train as Mormons, or stop to consider who they were, so long as they were palefaces.

That the trail led in the direction it did was proof to Buffalo Bill that those who controlled its movements were going wrong, either intentionally, or were at fault.

He was on duty just then as a mail rider, but the duty to humanity called for him to turn aside.

Congratulating himself that he was going through that day with no especial and important papers, or freight, Buffalo Bill pressed on after the train.

Eyeing the trail closely, he soon found out that it showed the tracks of half a dozen or more large wagons, a smaller one, and a vehicle that must be an ambulance.

There were the tracks of, perhaps, half a hundred driven horses, while the wagons were drawn by mules, as the tracks showed.

"This should give them about thirty people, a small number to resist attack from a large band of Indians," mused Buffalo Bill, as he rode along.

Out of the Monument Rock Valley he passed and the trail led into a canyon penetrating the mountains.

"The man that guides this train has been this way before, and knows where he is going," muttered the rider.

The trail continued on through the canyon on a rocky roadway that hardly left the trace of a mark of wheels or hoofs, but Buffalo Bill pushed on, and, after a few miles, came out into a broad valley.

There, several miles distant, he beheld the wagon train, pulling along towards a distant range of mountains.

Still keeping up his flying gait, in a short while he overtook the drove of stock being driven at the rear of the train by several men and boys.

They looked at him with evident surprise, and he asked:

"Ho, pard, which way are you going?"

"To a settlement the guide is taking us to," answered one of the men.

"Who is your guide?"

"We know him only as Keno, the Guide."

"Where is he?"

"On ahead with Captain Tom's wagon and ambulance, for they set the pace."

"You stop your horses here, for I will go ahead and turn the wagons back."

"What, are we going wrong, friend?" asked the man, with surprise and anxiety.

"I rather think you are. Stop here until I have seen your captain and the guide," and Buffalo Bill rode rapidly on once more.

He found the wagons toiling along, drawn by mules, as he had discovered by the hoof tracks. A number of men were driving them.

There were old men and old women, too, in the wagons, going to this new land, and babies in arms, while others in the full vigor of manhood and youth, rode alongside of the wagons.

Counting them as he rode along, Buffalo Bill muttered to himself:

"Fifty-seven, so far, and all food for Indian deviltry, if they go far on this trail."

Asking one of the horsemen where the "captain" was, he was told that he was with the other wagons and the ambulance a quarter of a mile ahead.

"I will ride on and see him, and, as he will turn back, you had best stop here and be ready for a retreat."

"Are we going wrong, sir?" asked one of the men, quickly.

"Yes."

"But we have the best guide on the frontier."

"Not if he brought you this way, for there lies the Indian country in that range yonder," and Buffalo Bill rode rapidly on to overtake those ahead.

CHAPTER III.

THE "CAPTAIN" OF THE OUTFIT.

Buffalo Bill soon came up with the vehicles in advance, and found several wagons and an ambulance.

In the latter was a man not in frontier costume,

but neatly dressed in a corduroy suit, and wearing a soft, round hat.

He was a fine-looking man of forty-five, and his face was intelligent, his bearing dignified and courteous.

By his side in the ambulance sat a young girl, neatly dressed and wearing a soft felt sun hat.

Her face was that of a maiden of seventeen, and very pretty, and her form was graceful, but her manners were those of the city-bred girl. There were in each of the wagons a couple of men dressed as frontiersmen, but which, however, did not disguise that they were tenderfeet.

"May I ask, sir, if you are in charge of this train?" and Buffalo Bill reined up his horse alongside of the ambulance, raising his hat politely as he did so.

"I am supposed to be, sir, though really being what you call out here a tenderfoot, I leave all to our guide," was the answer.

"Permit me to say, then, sir, that your guide is on the wrong trail."

"I can hardly believe that, for he is a perfect plainsman, sir."

"He may be that, sir, and yet be going wrong."

"But for what purpose, for he is in my pay to guide us right?"

"Where would you go, sir?"

"I have heard of a settlement near a station known as Prairie Police Ranch, where it is said there is fine land for cultivation and stock-raising, and, as my friends who accompany me are willing to follow my fortunes, we are seeking that point."

"I am from Prairie Ranch, sir, we call it the Riders' Retreat. I left it at noon, for I am a pony rider bearing express, and it was from seeing your trail cross the pony trail that I knew something was wrong and I followed you.

"I took the liberty of halting your wagons in the rear until I could turn you back."

The parties had now all gotten out of the vehicles, and stood regarding Buffalo Bill with marked interest, and the captain of the train said:

"But why may you not be the one who is wrong, and our guide be right?"

"I might be, sir; but I am not.

"I know this country thoroughly, and ride the trail daily, and I tell you, sir, frankly, that your guide is either lost or he is a traitor, and would lead you to your death."

"Strong words, my friend."

"I will repeat them to his face, sir."

"You say you are a pony rider?"

"I am so acting now. I am chief of the Prairie Police," said Buffalo Bill, simply.

"May I ask your name, for mine is Thomas Starbuck."

"Ah! the same as my pard's, the Overland Boss, sir, for his is Nat Starbuck. My name is Buffalo Bill, or rather, William F. Cody, though out here they call me by my nickname."

"Buffalo Bill!" he exclaimed, startled to find himself face to face with the famous scout. "I have heard our guide speak of you."

"Perhaps so, sir; but I have heard Captain Starbuck speak of a rich cousin of his by the name of Thomas Starbuck."

"Once rich, but now poor, my friend, for I lost my money by the unfortunate speculations of others, and so decided to find a home in the far West and start life anew, my daughter here and myself, while my friends in this train are people who worked for me, and, going down in the crash, decided to cast their lot with mine; so here we all are, and you have our history. But you know my cousin, Nat Starbuck, then?"

"I know him well, sir, and he will be delighted to welcome you, while you could not find a better place to settle than in Ranch Valley."

"I have not seen Nat since we were boys, but heard where he was and so decided to look him up."

"You would never find him upon this trail, sir, and, as it is growing late, I beg you to turn back and retrace your way with all speed, for I will guide you to the Overland trail, and you can camp there and follow it to-morrow to the ranch."

"But our guide has gone on ahead and bade us to come to a camp he would pick out for us."

"My dear sir, I repeat my words, that you would only follow him to your destruction, for in that mountain range yonder lies the Indian country, and he is leading you through gross ignorance, or from intention. I beg you to turn back now, before it is too late."

"What do you say, my friends?" and Thomas Starbuck turned to the men with him, but before they could answer, his daughter cried, earnestly:

"Do as this gentleman says, father, for you know I have never trusted Keno, the Guide, from the start."

"What did you say the man's name was, miss?" quickly asked Buffalo Bill.

"Keno, sir."

"There was a man by that name who was executed at our ranch for his crimes. He was known as the Red Danite, and as Red Hand, the Danite Captain, on account of his red deeds.

"He was a deserter from the army, a renegade chief of the Indians, a Mormon, and, later, an outlaw; but my pard, Wild Bill, captured him last fall; he was tried by Captain Nat Starbuck, found guilty, and hanged. Your guide must have taken his name."

"Well, the guide has seen us halt, and is returning," said one of the men, and Buffalo Bill saw a man coming rapidly back toward the train.

CHAPTER IV.

KENO, THE GUIDE.

If the people of the wagon train had expected to see Buffalo Bill, at the coming of the guide, show the "white feather," they were very much mistaken.

Not a muscle of his handsome face moved, and he said, in his quiet way:

"Mr. Starbuck, I will lead my horse beyond that wagon and keep out of view myself, while you say to the guide that you feel you are wrong and ask him to turn back.

"I will hear what he has to say, and be on hand at the proper time."

"I will do as you wish, sir, though it seems strange to take the word of a stranger against one who has proven himself a most faithful guide."

"I will be answerable to him, sir, and to you, if I go wrong."

"Trust this gentleman, father, for I feel that the guide has been deceiving us," said Ada Starbuck, while one of the men added:

"I say so, too, Cap'n Tom."

"I will do as you wish," Captain Tom responded, though he evidently still had faith in his guide.

Buffalo Bill went into hiding, and, a few minutes after, the guide came up.

"By God!" said Buffalo Bill, as he caught sight of the man through a tear in the wagon covering. The grave this time has surely given up its dead, for that is Red Hand, the Danite Captain, in the flesh, and I saw him hanged four months ago."

"Why has yer halted here, cap'n, when I told yer

I was goin' ter find yer a first-rate camp fer ther night?" said the guide, as he approached, and his tone was one of anger at having to return a mile or more on foot, as he had left his horse with the train.

He was a tall man, over six feet in height, of most muscular build, and with a wonderful quickness of movement for one of his size.

He was roughly dressed in striped pants, stuck in the top of heavy boots, a blue woolen shirt and a slouch hat, while he carried in his belt no fewer than four revolvers, two on each side, without holsters, and a long-bladed knife behind.

His hair, short beard and mustache were unkempt, and his face was bronzed to the hue of leather.

The face was a bold one, and was marred by the evil lurking in the piercing, deep-set eyes, and the almost savage expression about the mouth.

"I thought we might be wrong, guide, and, as there was a doubt I decided to halt, and when you returned go back."

"Go back be blowed! What am I here for? Don't I know my biz? You'll go where I guide yer!"

The words were jerked out, and the voice was harsh and angry, while the eyes fairly flamed.

The man had never shown such a manner or look before, but had been all gentleness.

"I will not go on, for, from what I have heard, the Indians must be in yonder range," declared Captain Tom, firmly.

"The redskins is all through this country. In yonder range is the ranch, an' that's whar I'm guidin' yer, so start up ther outfit, as I wants ter go in camp about four miles from here."

"I prefer to put back, guide, to the well-defined trail we crossed some ten miles back."

"That's a Injun trail. So, come, I says again; don't stand here, but push ahead!"

"Hands up, Keno Cain the Danite!" cried Buffalo Bill, coming suddenly out from behind one of the wagons, and covering the guide.

There was a startled cry, a muttered oath, but the hands went up quickly above the head of the guide while from the lips of the treacherous guide came distinctly:

"My God! Buffalo Bill, the Prairie Police Rider!"

All had heard the Mormon guide's words, which proved that the stranger was, indeed, Buffalo Bill, the pony rider, as he claimed to be.

"Yes, I am Buffalo Bill of the Prairie Police, and you are——"

"A guide, so why does yer hold me up?"

"Where are you guiding these people?"

"They wants to settle here."

"They wish to settle on the land, not under it, and you were guiding them into a trap, for the Indians are in ambush for them right ahead—I'll stake my life on it."

"It's a lie! it's a lie!" yelled the man.

"I never quarrel with a dying man, and that's what you are," was Buffalo Bill's significant reply. "Come, you are my prisoner, so I'll take those weapons."

"I'll give 'em to yer," cried the guide, and he started to lower his hands when the voice of Buffalo Bill rang out:

"Hold up your hands, sir, or I pull trigger."

"I'll disarm you," and, stepping forward, he quickly threw one after the other of the weapons from the belt to the ground. "May I ask for a lariat, sir?"

"Certainly."

"I will aid you to bind him," said Captain Tom, now thoroughly convinced of the treachery of his hitherto trusted guide.

"No, sir; I can bind him, as I have had more experience in such things," answered Buffalo Bill, and the manner in which he coiled the lasso about the man's body, his hands and feet, showed that he had indeed had "experience."

"Give him a place in one of the wagons, sir, and let one man keep his eye upon him, for he is as slippery as an eel."

"You know the man then, sir?"

"I knew a man bearing his name, but he was hanged in the Ranch Valley four months ago. This man is the image of him, is the same size, and has his voice, while he also bears his name, so it remains to be seen whether we hanged the wrong man or not, sir."

"At any rate, this fellow has also placed his head in the noose by his act of treachery to you."

"Let me urge that you at once turn back."

"I will do so, sir; and you must pardon me for doubting you, but that man has been as gentle as a dove up to his breakout a while since, and has been thoroughly faithful, why, he saved my life only yesterday at the risk of his own."

"How was that, sir?"

"I was away from the train, and Indians, five of them, surrounded me, when he attacked them single-handed."

Buffalo Bill laughed, and then said:

"Pardon me, but if you saw Indians yesterday, and that man ran them off, they were there to meet him and plan an ambush ahead."

"Were any of them killed, sir?"

"No, they ran when he fired upon them."

"You will find, Captain Starbuck, that this is a land of treachery and danger, sir."

"That man planned to lead you into a trap, and is either an outlaw of the Forty Thieves band, or he is a renegade paleface dwelling among redskins."

"Are you ready to move back, sir?"

"Yes, and we are ready to obey your orders."

"Then push on the back trail with all haste," and he added in a low tone:

"I am confident I saw Indians ahead just now, and it is some miles to a place where we can find a good stand-them-off camp."

These words hastened matters considerably, and the ambulance and wagons were soon on the back track.

Buffalo Bill galloped on ahead to hasten the other wagons in turning back, and, by the time the party, now in the rear, came up with them, they were all moving at a good pace.

"Drive to the front in your ambulance, Captain Starbuck, and set the pace, for there are Indians where I thought I saw them," said Buffalo Bill.

Captain Tom immediately obeyed, while Buffalo Bill, dropping back in the rear, turned his field glass upon the spot where he had sighted danger.

He had not long to look before he beheld striking proof that he had not been mistaken.

What he beheld were a number of Indians on a run, going from a spot, where they had been lying in hiding, over a ridge, a mile away, where their horses had been left.

"They could hide themselves, but not their ponies, there, and, when your train went into camp in that timber, they would have been very near you, sir," said Buffalo Bill, handing his glass to Captain Starbuck, who had given the reins to his daughter to drive, while he had mounted his horse and ridden back to join Buffalo Bill.

"I see them, sir, and there are quite a number. We surely owe you our lives," and Captain Starbuck

spoke with feeling. "I was sure something was wrong, sir, when I saw the wagon tracks crossing the trail."

"Yes, there are a couple of hundred of them yonder, at least, and I am sorry we cannot get further on to-night."

"Then we cannot push on?"

"Only to the camp I speak of, and which is a strong position, with water, timber and grass. They will head us off if we go further, and we will be ambushed. How is the train off for weapons?"

"We have plenty of firearms and ammunition, too."

"And you can rely upon your people?"

"Indeed I can, for though they may be what you call out here tenderfeet, they will fight bravely, as you will see, and I yield the command to you."

"I should go on with my pouches, but, fortunately, I have none of importance this run, and, as there are women and children along, I cannot desert you, nor will I."

"We will go into a fortified camp, I will be missed, they will search for me in time, see your trail and follow it, and if we can stand off the redskins twenty-four hours we will be all right, for the Prairie Patrol will come to our aid, and they can whip five times their weight in Indians."

CHAPTER V.

PREPARING TO FIGHT.

Buffalo Bill intended to make a stronghold of a rise of land with a brook that flowed around it, swift, deep and strong, in the shape of a horseshoe.

No horse or swimmer could cross the stream and reach the rocky shore which the emigrants must defend.

The land end of the place was not three hundred feet wide, and it rose abruptly and presented a bold front of rock.

It was, however, off the overland trail some half a dozen miles.

The rise was well timbered, was about forty feet above the adjacent land, and there was plenty of grass there, while the wagons could be drawn up the steep without a great deal of trouble.

For water, there was the brook which buckets could be lowered into by night, when the Indians could not see the one who was drawing it up, and if

forced to stand a siege, the rifles of the defenders would keep the redskins at a safe distance, for the shore on the other side was barren and sandy, with no place of protection for their foe.

In his observing way, Buffalo Bill had taken in the place in passing there as the very one for a stronghold when he was riding swiftly after the train.

Now to reach there was the question, and as he rode by each wagon, he called out:

"There is a good camp ahead, so push on with all speed, but drive steadily and don't have a breakdown."

When he came up with the ambulance he saw Ada Starbuck seated in it, the reins held well in hand, and her little foot ready upon the brake to be used quickly if needed.

"The wagons are keeping up so well, miss, you might drive a little faster," he said.

"I will, for I feel that time is everything now," was the answer, and the mules were urged on a little faster.

Then on over the rough trail the wagons and the led horses thundered, each driver fully realizing that a dread danger threatened them, and gazing with expressions of admiration and gratitude upon the splendid form of Buffalo Bill as he now led the way with Captain Tom by his side.

Having seen the train doing its best, Buffalo Bill had said:

"Will you ride on with me, sir, to look over the ground and place the wagons as they come up?"

"Certainly, and it is a good idea."

"You neglect nothing, I see, my friend," and Captain Starbuck urged his horse to a run to keep up with the scout.

Out of the trail wheeled Buffalo Bill when he came near the camping place, and, riding up to it, the two quickly dismounted.

"You see we have a natural stronghold here, sir, and the wagons can make the climb with assistance."

"Once here we have a small fort, as it were; not much over an acre in size, and one we can easily defend, for you must have at least thirty men."

"Thirty-seven fighters, sir, then half a dozen boys from twelve to fifteen, and, in all, ninety-one people."

"We can make a brave show then. See, the Indians are pressing on, but we will be ready for them."

Captain Starbuck took the field glass handed to him and said:

"They look to be in very large force."

"Two hundred at least."

"I should have said far more. How far are they away?"

"All of five miles."

"And the wagons are near, thank Heaven."

"Yes, sir; they will be all coraled here within a few minutes, and in twenty the Indians will be upon us, while darkness will soon fall."

"Let me tell you now, sir, that my idea is that the Indians will come with a rush, trying to stampede the cattle and demoralize the people at once; but, if we meet them bravely, we will check them, and then they will try strategy."

"Have your people ever been under fire?"

"Well, I can hardly say that we have, for we only had a slight brush with a small band of redskins, and, before that, some outlaws sought to rob us, but were foiled by a few shots."

"All right, they will not waver, I am sure; but the redskins have halted there from some cause, just what I cannot say; but I think something has fallen from one of the wagons, though why that should stop them I cannot see; but here are the wagons," and, as the ambulance drove up, Buffalo Bill called a halt and ordered the men to the front to aid each vehicle up the steep and rugged way to the hilltop.

They obeyed quickly, and first went the ambulance, then the loose horses were driven up, and next, wagon after wagon, until all had safely reached the top and were placed in position by Buffalo Bill.

As the last one came up, the chief called out to the driver of it:

"Is not that the wagon that was ahead with the ambulance?"

"Yes, sir; it's Captain Tom's wagon."

"Is your prisoner all right?"

"My God, sir; he is gone! He has jolted out of the rear end," cried the man.

"He jolted himself out and took chances, bound as he was," exclaimed Buffalo Bill.

"It was he that the Indians halted for; but never mind him now, for there is work to be done, and the redskins are coming ahead once more," and Buffalo Bill turned to arrange the men for defense.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RED RIDERS CHARGE.

The train people were nervous, there was no denying that fact, but men and women saw how cool their commander was, and tried to emulate his example.

Captain Tom was calm and self-possessed, also, while Ada Starbuck was as chipper as a bird and showed no fear.

All had read of the massacres by Indians, and, since reaching the far West, had heard tales of red-skin cruelties time and again.

But Buffalo Bill got the men together to defend the rise leading to their position, called for all the weapons, and told the women just where they were to remain, with the children, while the horses and mules were corralled in a secure place.

The sun was just upon the horizon as Buffalo Bill said, cheerily:

"Let them come now, for we are ready for them."

There were two guns to a man, counting muskets and shotguns that were in addition to the rifles, and the men had over a hundred revolvers.

Ammunition was in plenty, and with the weapons all loaded and men occupying good positions, a feeling of confidence began to settle upon all, as Buffalo Bill passed along the line.

"Unfortunately, that traitor guide of yours knows exactly our numbers, and we must fight the harder for that."

"Then, too, the Indians will be rather anxious to capture me, but I'll do all I can to thwart them, and, altogether, we can make a grand fight of it," said Buffalo Bill, to Captain Tom.

Some of the women had tears in their eyes, but they kept from showing further weakness, and, if a few of the children were crying in their fright, that was to be expected.

Buffalo Bill stood upon a rock, calmly viewing the approach of savage horsemen.

To him it was an ordinary spectacle, but to Ada Starbuck a most extraordinary one, and as she looked at the rapidly moving ponies, the gayly decorated braves and the painted faces coming to fight and destroy, she was awed as well as impressed with the grandeur of the scene, and said, earnestly:

"That is a grand, yet terrible sight, Buffalo Bill."

"You are a brave little lady to admire what threatens you with death; but it is, indeed, a grand sight; and will be grander when they charge us,

when shots and yells fill the air, ponies and riders go down, and death holds high carnival," replied Buffalo Bill. "See, our tenderfeet defenders, following your example, stand as brave as veterans at their post."

"Yes, and they'll fight like veterans, but you must not expose yourself, Miss Starbuck, for arrows and bullets respect not even beauty."

The young woman blushed at the compliment.

"But just think," she said, "what all that grand display of painted, savage braves would have meant to us but for you, sir."

"Oh! how much we have to thank you for, and how quietly you subdued that man who loved to tell us of his hairbreadth escapes, and that he knew no such word as fear."

"But I mistrusted him all the time, only the others, my father included, liked the man; but see, what are they halting for?"

"To form for the charge."

"You must go to shelter now," and, turning to the men, Buffalo Bill called out:

"Attention, all!"

"Let no man fire until I give the word."

"Then lay aside your empty rifles and take the extra ones, firing again."

"Then use your revolvers if they still come on."

"Keep well under cover, do not throw your shots away, but fire deliberately and take good aim."

"The boys who reload your weapons must do it quickly and well."

"Are all ready?"

A chorus of voices answered in the affirmative, and Buffalo Bill continued:

"If any man is killed, and we must expect it, pay no heed to it, for he will be beyond aid."

"If any man is wounded, let him stick to his post, if able to do so, and if not, he can withdraw quietly."

"You can die but once, but there are those you love, to defend, so let every man do his duty."

"Now they are ready."

"Keep cool and await the command to fire."

The cheer that answered the words of Buffalo Bill convinced him that he had brave men to fight under him, tenderfeet though they might be to the ways of the Wild West.

The Indians had now formed in three columns of seven braves abreast, and each column Buffalo Bill quickly estimated at about seventy horsemen.

A chief was at the head of each column, and, as

they moved forward, Buffalo Bill saw that a group of horses remained behind and there were several braves with them. But in their midst he recognized the face of Keno Cain, the guide.

"Coward, I dare you to come on!" he shouted, in a voice that reached the traitor guide, for he was seen to raise his fist and shake it, but what he said could not be heard.

Once they moved forward, the Indian horsemen went from a walk to a trot, then to a canter that ended in a wild charge, while from two hundred throats broke forth savage yells, and showers of arrows were sent flying upon the little camp of defenders.

It was an appalling scene, and it seemed that the mass of horses and warriors would surely break into the line of defenders and the end must soon come.

Every eye was upon Buffalo Bill as he stood upon a rock in full view, seeking no shelter, though he had so earnestly urged it upon all others.

The women and children from the rear beheld him standing there, a rifle by his side, and the men gazed upon him with admiration, while Captain Tom twice called out to him to seek shelter.

But still he stood watching the advance of the savage horsemen.

Suddenly to his side glided a slender form.

It was Ada Starbuck.

"If you seem to think there is no danger here, I will remain with you," she said, in a tone of reproach at his seeming recklessness.

"My dear young lady, there will be the greatest danger here when the red devils get nearer; but I know the ranges of their weapons, and intended leaving at the proper time—come, we will seek shelter now," and as Buffalo Bill spoke, a number of arrows dropped about them.

As he gently thrust Ada Starbuck behind the shelter of a large rock, he threw his rifle to his shoulder, his eye ran along the barrel, his finger touched the trigger, and with the sharp report the gorgeously-attired chief leading the center column fell from his horse.

A cheer from the train men greeted this exhibition of deadly aim, but not a man fired a shot.

They waited for the word, as they had been commanded to do, and a smile of satisfaction passed over the face of Buffalo Bill at their good discipline.

But the Indians were drawing dangerously near,

and that the men were getting anxious there was no doubt.

A few more bounds of the ponies up the steep hill, and then came the command, heard above the demoniacal yells of the Indians, who were maddened at the fall of their chief.

"Fire!"

Nearly forty rifles flashed forth like a volley fired by disciplined soldiers, and down went ponies and riders, while the column, hit hard, staggered under the shock.

"Now, your extra guns—fire!"

They were the muskets now, and the shotguns, loaded heavily with slugs and buckshot, and the reports were deafening and scattering.

The blow was at a still closer range than the rifle volley, and the shock was more staggering than the other.

But the red horsemen still pressed on from the rear over the dead and wounded braves and horses in their front, their blood-curdling yells sounding more appalling as they drew nearer.

CHAPTER VII.

A FIGHT FOR SCALPS.

"Now your revolvers, men!"

"Fire at will!"

"Boys, reload quickly and well."

The first was shouted to the men.

Buffalo Bill had called out the last words to the boys engaged in reloading the emptied rifles.

"I'll command this squad!" cried the clear voice of Ada Starbuck, rising above the popping of the revolvers.

The men were now emptying their revolvers at close range, for the redskins had drawn dangerously near.

Loud rang the voice of Buffalo Bill, cheering them, as, now defying danger, he stood boldly exposed and fired his revolver with cool deliberation, while Captain Starbuck was doing all in his power to encourage the men.

"More rifles loaded!" shouted the clear voice of Ada Starbuck, as she rushed forward with an armful of them, and was followed by several boys also bearing weapons.

The men seized them, and as the rifles began to roar again, the Indian horsemen, some of them on

foot and climbing the rocks, could no longer face the deadly storm of lead, and with yells of rage, turned and fled.

Those still pressing on in the rear also were seized with the panic, and broke in confusion, a few of them rallying to bear off their wounded comrades.

"Keep up your fire, men!"

"Spare no one, for they know not mercy!" was heard in the voice of Buffalo Bill, while, as the now reloaded weapons began to rattle, the Indians, unable to longer stand the fire, stampeded down the slope like a herd of Texas steers, and quickly sought refuge beyond the range of the death-dealing rifles.

"Bravo, men! We have won!"

"Three cheers for our gallant commander!"

It was Captain Tom whose voice was now heard, and the men gave three cheers for Buffalo Bill, who raised his hat quickly in response, and then said:

"Now to see to our dead and wounded and the reloading of all weapons and replacing them, ready for use, for these redskins have not given up the fight, by any means."

These words cast a slight damper over the victors, for they had supposed the fight ended, but they felt that Buffalo Bill knew, and at once set to work to first get their guns ready and then to care for their wounded.

In the gathering twilight, the men saw to the reloading of their weapons and standing them by their sides ready for instant use.

Then Buffalo Bill and Captain Tom, with four men who had improvised a stretcher of a blanket folded around two tent poles, tenderly bore the wounded back to a safe place, where Ada Starbuck and several of the women at once took them in charge, to care for them under the direction of one of the men who had served for a couple of years in a hospital.

There were half-a-dozen wounded, two of the number seriously, and three men had been killed.

A boy had also been slightly wounded, and one of the women, who had not remained in the shelter, had an arrow lodged in her arm.

Several of the horses had also been hit with arrows, and a mule killed, so that the little camp had suffered severely in the fight, though they were by no means disheartened, and were full of pluck for another brush with their foes, if necessary.

One and all were loud in their praise of Buffalo

Bill, and freely admitted that they owed everything to him.

He had, in the meantime, thoroughly reconnoitered the position, and had placed sentinels where he felt they would be needed.

"I will do my duty out in front, Captain Starbuck, and you must keep going the rounds of the sentinels, for though I expect no attack before dawn, and do not believe the redskins can attack from the river, you must keep up a night watch, and let no man go to sleep on his post."

"I will see to it, sir, that they keep good watch, but do you think they will wait until dawn before attacking?"

"Yes, sir; for these redskins, being Apaches, will not fight at night; but to be prepared for them, I will scout outside."

"You will take desperate chances in doing so."

"No, sir, for I am accustomed to this kind of work, and I hope with that long-range rifle you loaned me, to get a chance to pick off your guide, and see how many more lives the fellow has."

"Don't venture too much, I beg of you. But did not the redskins suffer heavily under our fire?"

"Yes, sir; for the men fought with coolness and good judgment. They did great execution, and the Indians lost at least a third of their ponies and a fourth of their braves, killed and wounded, I feel certain."

"Then our loss is light in comparison; but come, for Ada is calling us to supper," and Thomas Starbuck led the way to where his own little camp was, and there an old family servant of his, who had been his daughter's nurse, and had refused to leave her, had prepared a good supper for them.

Buffalo Bill ate heartily, and with the air of a man to whom such scenes as the one they had just passed through was an everyday occurrence to him.

Supper over, he made the rounds of the sentinels with Captain Tom, and then, with the long-range, borrowed rifle in hand, he started down the hill.

He soon came to the dead braves and ponies that had reached nearest to the line, and from there on made his way most cautiously.

In the darkness he could see nothing at a further distance than a few feet, for the sky was overcast with clouds.

He saw horses writhing in agony with their wounds, but no wounded braves lay upon the hillside, for

they had either been carried off by their comrades or had crawled away themselves, but there were quite a number of dead warriors.

Buffalo Bill had reached the base of the hill, and then he halted as he heard a sound that startled him.

"That renegade has prevailed upon them to make a night charge, and they are creeping up on foot," said Buffalo Bill, and quickly he began to retrace his way, for, dark as it was, he had seen what appeared to be a mass moving slowly toward the rise.

In a couple of minutes he was within the camp, the men were aroused for action, and the word was passed along:

"Aim your guns at a dark shadow you will soon see slowly moving up the hill, and fire at the word of command!"

The men were nerved by their victory of two hours before to do their best, and they were also aware that a night attack might be harder to repel than one by day.

They had not long to wait before they could see the coming "shadow," and, a moment later, came the loud command of their trusted leader:

"Fire!"

The sheet of flame that shot out from the hilltop told the cunning braves that their foes were not to be caught napping, as they had supposed, and a perfect hurricane of leaden hail tore with dull thuds into many a heart and brain, while the glare of the red flashes lighted up the scene, revealing the crouching savages all ready for their fatal rush upon their paleface foes.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BOLD VENTURE.

Cunning as they were, there was one in the camp who could overmatch them.

Down the hill the Indians retreated in a greater panic than before, and when darkness reigned once more, the wounded braves began to drag themselves off the field.

There was no groan of anguish from these red warriors, schooled to suffer pain without a murmur.

All in the camp knew that again they owed their lives to Buffalo Bill.

What if he had not gone out upon that scouting tramp?

The result was too fearful to contemplate, and

men and children pressed around him and expressed their gratitude in earnest words.

Calling Captain Tom and several of the men aside, Buffalo Bill said:

"We have driven these redskins off twice, but they have by no means given up the fight.

"It is not their nature to do so.

"They will not make another attack before dawn, but I expect that they will do so then.

"As they cannot cross the river, they will again attack at the open end of our camp.

"Now you have all shown yourselves as steady as veterans under fire, and you will not need me for the next attack, which cannot be as strong in numbers, as they have lost one-third their force."

All looked anxiously at Buffalo Bill as the camp-fire light fell upon him.

After a pause, Buffalo Bill continued:

"Now, these redskins are dangerously near their village, and after their second defeat just now, I am sure they have sent couriers up into the mountain range you were making for when I overtook you, to bring many more warriors to their aid."

"They are well aware that they are out of hearing of any pony rider passing along the trail, half a dozen miles from here, and that the riders dash by like the wind, and more, they do not expect aid to come to you, knowing from this guide that no one knows of your being here, save myself, and that I am here with you.

"So, if they fail in the daylight attack, they will settle down to capture you by strategy, keeping you constantly on the alert, tiring you out, picking off your sentinels, firing on you from across the river, or they will dig holes to lie in and shoot from.

"In fact, there is no end to an Indian's cleverness and means of capturing a foe.

"Now, I am but one man, and you would miss me only as such in the next fight, while I can do you more good away from you than here.

"I will be missed when I fail to go in on time, at the ranch, but it may be twenty-four hours before they start out a search party for me.

"If so, they will reach the spot where you crossed the trail after nightfall, and so will not see it, and you will then have a long day and another night of siege.

"If the patrol find I have not passed the stations, they will have to wait until day, so it will be, per-

haps, late the second day before they reach here, and in such small force they can do no good, as the Indians will have reinforcements long before.

Having explained the situation fully, and that when aid comes, as the Indians will have reinforcements before then, it may be too late, I will now tell you my plan."

"We rely wholly upon you, Mr. Cody, to guide us out of this predicament," said Captain Starbuck, with an anxious smile.

"My plan is to leave you and go with all speed on foot to the nearest relay station, and send for the Prairie Police."

"But you cannot possibly leave, Mr. Cody, with all those Indians in our front," said Captain Starbuck.

"They have it well guarded; but I think I may get through by disguising myself."

"Disguising yourself?"

"Yes; playing Indian."

"I do not exactly grasp your meaning."

"When I went out before I saw a number of Indians, and I can go now, get some of their traps, rub paint enough off their faces to smear mine, which, with a little charcoal black, will make me look Indian enough to fool them in the night.

"Then a headdress and blanket will do the rest, and, if I am not inspected at close range, I will go through all right, and perhaps can cut out a horse from their herd, so I will not have to walk."

"Ah, Mr. Cody, I cannot think of allowing you to take such a risk," said Captain Tom, while the others said:

"No, no; it will never do to take such a risk."

"Gentlemen, let me tell you frankly that it will be a greater risk to remain here unless aid comes to you quickly," was Buffalo Bill's significant reply.

The impressive and significant manner in which Buffalo Bill replied to them convinced the trainmen of the gravity of their situation.

Having shown that he might pass through the lines easily in disguise, without going very near to any Indian, Buffalo Bill convinced the men that it was the only thing for him to do.

They did not wish to give him up, nor did they care to see him risk himself in such a way, while they felt that they needed his help and example; but there was nothing for it but that he should go, and he was quickly ready for the start.

He carried with him his revolvers and knife, and going over the barrier of rocks as quietly as he could, with a whispered farewell to Captain Tom and the others, he soon disappeared in the darkness.

Finding the bodies of the dead Indians, with his handkerchief, which he had first saturated in water, he began to rub the paint off their faces and transfer it to his own.

This he kept up, going from Indian to Indian, until he felt that he had made his face hideous enough to pass muster.

Then he pulled his long hair on each side of his face, put on an Indian headdress, and folded about him a blanket that he took from the body of the chief he had killed.

He was tempted to wear his gorgeous war bonnet also; but he knew it would quickly catch the eye, and what he desired most was to avoid attracting attention.

When fully costumed he went on more boldly to the base of the hill.

But he halted suddenly, for instead of finding an Indian guard there, his keen eyes detected that the whole band was camped straight across the neck of land.

To attempt to pass through such a line would be worse than madness, and Buffalo Bill lay there pondering as he took in the long line of sleeping redskins that barred his way.

"There are more ways than one of out-Injuning an Injun," he muttered at last, and he began to creep back up the hill.

When he suddenly appeared before Captain Tom and the group he had left not an hour before, his appearance gave them a shock which caused one of the men to remark:

"None of us have heart disease, or that sudden fright would have killed us, Mr. Cody."

"I am glad I look so much like an Indian. Yet it was all of no use, for they are camped clear across the neck, and I came back to try another plan."

"But what other plan can you try?" anxiously asked Captain Tom, for dawn was now not very far off.

"I will go by water."

"By water?"

"Yes; I will slip down to the brook and go that way."

"You must be a daring swimmer, to venture into that wild stream, Mr. Cody."

"I swim well, sir; but the drawback is that on the other side, from here down, you noticed that the cliff banks begin."

"Yes."

"The stream turns this hill and then runs toward the Indian Mountains, and, with its cliff banks, I can find no landing for a mile, as I know, for once I rode down on this shore for miles.

"When I can land, I am on the other side of a rugged range, which will give me a dozen more miles to walk than if I could have slipped through the redskin lines, turned up stream, crossed at the ford, and gone right along on the trail your guide led you by.

"But there is no other way for me to go, and now I only regret not having gone that way in the first place, before spoiling my beauty," and Buffalo Bill laughed.

"The water is very cold now, Mr. Cody, and you will be chilled through."

"Yes, with the melting snows in the mountains, it will be chilly, but I'll soon warm up in running."

"Now I wish to find a boat for my revolvers."

"A boat?"

"Yes, a log, or sticks, to make a little raft to carry them on, for I wish to keep them dry."

A little raft was soon made, the revolvers were wrapped in a blanket, and put upon it, and a line was fastened to it, which Buffalo Bill was to tie about him when he got into the water.

A good place was then found for him to get down into the stream, and placing his shoes, outer leggings, socks, hunting jacket and hat also on the raft, he went down into the chilly waters.

Fastening the line about his waist, he launched the raft and then struck quietly out from the shore.

In an instant he was in the swift-rushing current.

CHAPTER IX.

IN NEED OF HELP.

Rio Grande Rob and eight followers were riding along in Indian file, all feeling blue over the mysterious disappearance of Buffalo Bill.

They had ridden into the somber little valley in which stood Monument Rock, when Rob had suddenly halted.

All the riders spurred quickly to his side, and every eye was fixed upon what he was looking at in surprise.

"A trail!"

"A wagon trail!"

"A big one, too!"

"An army force, I guess!"

"No, it's not artillery."

"And going toward Indian land."

"Going to the devil!" broke in Rio Grande Rob.

"It's a wagon trail, and made by settlers, of course, looking for a place to settle, and who will find a place to remain until Judgment Day."

"There are a dozen wagons at least, half a hundred or more driven horses, and they are lost and going to their graves."

"Boys, I believe Buffalo Bill saw this trail and followed it, for he's not the man to let men, women and children go to death if he can prevent, no matter what the Overland Company may suffer."

"But why has he not come back before this?"

This last question of Rio Grande Rob no one could answer.

"I guess you are right, pard, and Buffalo Bill followed this trail to turn them back," said Harper.

"But where is he?" asked one.

"Where are they?" another questioned.

"It looks bad."

"Pards, we'll take this trail, but first I want to send for help, so one of you go westward, collecting one or two men at every station to the relay this side Valley Ranch; it would leave his daughter Sunbeam alone if you took Velvet Dick, and you can get half a dozen stocktenders without him."

"Send them right here with all speed, and you, Hale, ride as though Satan was after you, sending the men here from each station, and tell Captain Nat the situation."

"I hope Dan and his party will have returned by the time you reach the ranch, and a big force of men can be sent, for I'll bet the Lone Star of Texas against an Indian's scalp, that outfit that left this trail is corralled by redskins somewhere and with a big chance of making 'stiffs' of the whole party."

"Now, pards, be off, and just say that you think Buffalo Bill is with the outfit, and that will make them push the faster."

"I'll ride on with the rest here, and when I find

what the trouble is, send a man back here to meet you all."

"Go!"

Away they darted, one eastward, the other westward, and they soon disappeared from sight, while the others rode on, following the wagon trail up Monument Rock Valley.

"We are only seven, pards, a small force to go to the rescue against a large number of Indians," said one of the men, more cautious than the others.

"Pard Reuben, never count the odds when women and children cry for help," was the retort of Rio Grande Rob, and he continued:

"My idea is that Buffalo Bill is at the end of this trail, and I'll bet every dollar I ever expect to win at poker that he never counted the odds against him in trying to save those who he knew were going this way to sure death."

"I did fear Bill might have gone under, but to my mind this trail explains where he is."

"If I am wrong, we can, at least, save others."

"If we are but seven, those two boys will be sending help here from each station, and by night we should have near fifty men following on our trail, and I would then like to see the half a thousand redskins our police rangers can't whip out in a good cause."

"Come, pards, we'll strike a livelier gait than this, for I've seen time when minutes were worth days."

The pace was quickened, the men riding along in a swinging gallop.

When they got out of the somber valley and came to where there was some mud from the overflow of a swamp, Rob suddenly drew rein and cried:

"Look at that, pards!"

"Tracks!"

"Yes, the tracks of Buffalo Bill's horse, or I never sinned in my life, for I have been taking stock of these hoof marks all along."

"Buffalo Bill's horse made that trail."

"Right you are, pard," cried a voice from a thicket near by, and with one accord the pony riders shouted:

"Buffalo Bill!"

The men cried out with delight at first, and then they all looked in wonder, and ended with a burst of laughter.

And no wonder, for there stood Buffalo Bill, the

handsome, dashing, well-dressed "Dandy of the Trail," changed into a most comical-looking being.

His hat was gone, and his hair was wet and matted.

He was in his shirt sleeves, and his belt was devoid of any weapons.

His shirt and leggings were wet and clung close to his form, while his feet were bare of shoes or socks.

But worst of all was his face, which was daubed all the hues of the rainbow, giving him a most ludicrous expression.

Buffalo Bill joined in the laughter at his expense, and said, dryly:

"I guess I am an ugly picture, pard. I'd like to have a photograph of myself."

But the laughter suddenly ceased, when Rio Grande Rob called out:

"Pards, look at those feet."

They were cut, bruised and bleeding, and a closer look showed that the hands were bloodstained, too, while the face, in spite of its being streaked with paint, was haggard and white.

"Why, Bill, you have had a hard time of it, and are suffering. At first we saw only the funny side of your appearance."

"That is all right, but I have had a rough time of it, for I escaped from danger by swimming Whirlpool Creek, and lost my little raft in the rough waters, with my hat, coat, shoes and weapons.

"As I am on a mission of life and death, I did not mind the cuts and bruises in going barefoot, or in making my way through thickets.

"Pards, you are needed, and needed bad. Have you a horse that I can ride?"

"Take mine, for I am light and will mount the pack animal," and Rio Grande Rob sprang from his horse.

Others quickly offered their horses, but Rob insisted, as the stirrups of his saddle could be lengthened. Besides that, Rob's horse was the best in the outfit.

"All right, Rob, I'll go you, and we will lose no time, for, as I said, you are wanted and wanted bad.

"Come along with me, and I'll talk as I ride, but are there no more coming?"

"Yes, for I sent men each way when I saw the wagon tracks crossing the trail, to send all the men from the relays here, and to tell Captain Starbuck we needed fighting men. I thought that it would be

better to give the men a hard ride, even if they were not needed, than to call on them if they were."

"Right you are, Rio Grande Rob, as you generally are. Now, where are the men to come to?"

"To the Monument Rock."

"Good, and the first men told must be already on their way there. So, Harper, you go back and remain there—ride the pack animal, and I'll take your horse—and when the men come up in force enough to make a show, push right on along this trail.

"If Wild Bill is along, tell him it is Horseshoe Hill, for he knows it, and he will find a wagon train besieged there.

"It is half a mile below where this trail crosses the ford of Whirlpool Creek, and down stream.

"We will cut our way in, if we can, and, if not, we'll go into siege near by to await your coming, provided we cannot scare the redskins off; but it may take all our force from the ranch to do that if they have been reinforced.

"Tell the boys there are about thirty fighting men in the train.

"Now, as moments are precious, we will start, and it will feel mighty good for me to ride, after the fifteen mile tramp I have had barefooted and without guns or food."

Harper leaped upon the pack animal and was off in an instant, and Buffalo Bill, mounting his horse, set the pace in the other direction, and a good pace it was.

The horses were kept at a run for miles, and then Buffalo Bill drew rein upon a ridge.

"Pardners, the hill is not half a mile away, and you hear those shots that tell us the train people still hold out, and are popping away at an Indian when they get a chance.

"Now, there are redskins on this side of the stream, I am sure, but by this trail we can reach the ford before they can see us.

"In fact, as they are not expecting us, not knowing that I escaped last night, we can ride along the stream where it is shallow, until we get within a couple of hundred yards of the hill, and then make a dash for it."

CHAPTER X.

THE CHARGE OF THE PRAIRIE POLICE.

To do just as Buffalo Bill said, the riders would have followed him to certain death, and Rio Grande Rob said:

"You are the doctor, Pard Bill, and know just what the patients need to drive off the attack of the red devils they are suffering with. Just set the tune and we'll join in with you."

"I know that well. Now we have given our horses a breathing spell, we will further rest them by going slow to the ford."

"Are you ready, boys?"

"All ready," was the answer.

Buffalo Bill had borrowed one of Harper's revolvers, and Rob had an extra one along, and Buffalo Bill took that, so he felt like himself once again with the two weapons stuck in his belt.

"I'm all right now, if I don't look it," he said, with a smile, and he rode ahead once more with the Texan by his side.

They followed the wagon trail down from the ridge, across some meadow land fringed with willows, and were thus concealed from the view of those they sought to rescue, and from the Indians, too.

They reached the ford, and, in crossing the swift stream, which rose to their saddle girths, they gave their horses a few swallows of water.

There was a bend in the stream at the ford which still kept them concealed, and crossing, they turned downstream, sheltered by the further bank from view.

The little band soon came to a spot where they must leave the water, and all knew that as soon as they ascended the bank the redskins would discover them.

Taking in the situation, Buffalo Bill said:

"Pards, the hill lies about three hundred yards below us, perhaps a little more."

"We will ride up the bank here, and make for the hill."

"The Indians are encamped about a quarter of a mile from the hill, in some timber, but they will have to hustle to head us off, though they will pump arrows and lead at us pretty lively."

"There are Indians across the river on the ridge we just left, as you can hear their rifles firing at the train people, and they may pepper us, too."

"Are you ready?"

The men looked to their saddle-girths and their weapons, and, remounting, settled themselves well in their saddles.

"All ready," came their firm reply. The rest had greatly relieved the horses, and they could make the short run at full speed.

"When we dash into view, pards, we will give our Prairie Police war cry, and the Indians will at first think we have a much larger force, and that will be in our favor."

"Come!"

Up the steep bank rode Buffalo Bill, and behind him came Rio Grande Rob and then the others.

The order was single file at first, to present less space to the firing of the Indians.

The gallant band had got a hundred feet into view before they were discovered, and then came the thrilling war cry of the Prairie Police, and the Indians knew it well.

There was a wild stampede for their ponies at first, as it was not believed possible that so small a force had dared come to the rescue.

The redskins across the river, too, were startled, fearing that they had been surrounded, and, for a moment, it seemed as though the little band of heroes were going to put twenty times their number to flight.

But the redskins soon saw the end of the line, and that no more horsemen appeared over the bank.

Though it was hard to believe, it was true, and they gave vent to wild yells, and at once set to work to try and head them off before they reached the hill.

Could they do this the Prairie Police were doomed.

On foot and horseback, over a hundred warriors surged toward the hill, and the wild riders knew that the test for life or death was coming—that it was before them.

"Men, it is make the hill or die!"

"Crowd close, and come on!" came in the firm, clear voice of Buffalo Bill.

The riders answered with a yell, obeyed the order, dropped their reins upon the horns of their saddles, and followed their daring leader.

The cries of the savages had told the train people that something was wrong with them, and they heard the war cry of the riders, and then beheld the devoted little band of heroes.

"It is Buffalo Bill coming to our rescue, but, my

God! he will be utterly wiped out!" cried Captain Tom to the train people, as all now beheld the daring Prairie Police in their magnificent charge.

To the joy of all those of the train, men and women, who looked on the desperate rush of the little band, they came nearer the goal.

They had their faces bent on the hill they were risking so much to meet, but their eyes were upon foes, rushing with full speed to head them off, reckless of their own lives if they could only overwhelm those riders.

But the little band pushed on, and, as it seemed, they must meet their red enemies in a hand-to-hand struggle, the train people heard the loud command of Buffalo Bill:

"Halt and give them your rifles!

"Fire!"

There was a sudden halt, six rifles flashed, and each shot told.

If they had lost a moment to fire, the Indians were staggered by the deadly discharge, and a wild yell went up as they beheld half a dozen of their comrades fall from their ponies, for the mounted warriors had been the ones aimed at, as they were the most dangerous.

"We must support them and cover their retreat," cried Captain Tom, and he started with a dozen men down the hill.

Buffalo Bill shouted:

"Go back! We'll get there!"

The Prairie Police were thankful, however, for the volley the train people poured upon their foes, again staggering them, and gave Captain Tom and his men a cheer.

"They are using revolvers, now," cried the leader of the train people, as Buffalo Bill's command was heard:

"Give them your revolvers, men!"

The rapid rattle of the revolvers made merry music, and the shots were not thrown away.

The daring riders were at bay, but calm and dangerous.

Again the Indian mounted column wavered under the fire, but the dismounted braves were hastening on, and, half halting, fired.

A horse went down.

It was Rio Grande Rob's.

But, agile as a cat, he caught on his feet, and,

with a leap was up behind the nearest comrade to him in a second.

Then came a shower of arrows, with a few bullets, and one of the riders, Nat Clay, reeled, clutched at the air, and fell from his saddle.

But, hardly had he struck the ground before Buffalo Bill had halted, thrown him across his horse, and was again in the saddle, just as another horse went down.

But the rider did not fall, but caught also on his feet, and grasping the tail of the riderless horse as he passed him, kept up with the procession.

The revolvers were empty now, but Captain Tom and his men sent in another staggering volley, and, the next instant the hill was reached, amid wild cheers of triumph, mingling with the maddened yells of the redskins.

"Wheel and beat them back!

"Load the rifles, boys!" shouted Buffalo Bill, and, dismounting now, the six Prairie Riders turned about, and, seizing weapons handed them by the boys and several women, they opened fire upon the Indians, who, mounted and on foot, were trying to break in during the confusion.

But the extra rifles and guns sent a storm of bullets into their midst that even Indian courage could not face, and as the boys, urged on by Ada Starbuck, kept supplying all with freshly loaded weapons, the victory was won, and the foes ran for shelter with all speed, leaving a number of dead upon the field.

Then Captain Tom turned to Buffalo Bill, and, grasping his hand, cried:

"You are back again, safe, thank God! But why did you take such desperate chances?"

"For two reasons, one being that I hoped our coming would stampede the Indians, who would naturally expect a large force.

"In the second place, if they did not stampede, you would have the benefit of our aid, for my comrades are old and skilled Indian fighters, and could help greatly until reinforcements came for others are coming and before long."

"Mr. Cody, how can we all thank you and your friends?" said Ada Starbuck, coming up, and grasping his hand, and she added:

"Your appearance shows what you went through

to serve us. Why, you are wounded in the head!" she cried, suddenly, and the brave girl dashed off to her improvised hospital to secure bandages.

CHAPTER XI.

WILD BILL IN THE GAME.

The Indians returned to their former positions, and were venting their fury by occasional shots and with wild yells of hatred.

Captain Tom told Buffalo Bill that a demonstration had been made at dawn, but finding the train people ready for them, the Indians had not made a direct charge.

The shadows were lengthening when Buffalo Bill, who had been searching the expanse of country toward the hills, called to Captain Tom to approach.

"Take my glass, and you will see that reinforcements are coming to them."

"You are right."

"The courier we saw ride rapidly away, after our arrival was sent to hasten them on, sir."

"How many do you think are coming?"

"As well as I can judge at this distance, I should say all of a hundred, if not more."

Rio Grande Rob then joined them.

"Take my glass, and see if you can make out anything over toward the mountains."

"You bet I do!"

"What?"

"Indians."

"How many?"

"I call them a hundred or more. They will be here in an hour's time."

"Yes, for they are pushing right along."

"It will be night, then."

"About."

"And what about our pards?"

"They'll not be far away when wanted."

"So I say, though they may not show up until needed."

"The messengers will explain all to them."

"Let me see, we ought to have at least forty by dark, and more coming."

"All of that, chief."

"And forty of our men, Captain Starbuck, are a match for ten times their number, and the Indians know it."

"I hope Wild Bill will be in command, pard."

"Yes, Rob, for he knows this hill well, as he and I camped here once, and he is acquainted with its approaches, while he also understands handling the men in a fight. Now, Captain Tom, how many men have you for a fight?"

"Twenty-seven of us, including myself."

"And we are five, as we lost poor Clay, and Boone is too badly wounded to be of any service—thirty-two, all told."

"Captain Tom, we have nothing to fear from those Indians and their reinforcements, and, if I am not mistaken, before another sun rises, they will have cause to remember Horseshoe Hill."

"I hope so."

"Cheer your people up, sir, and have horses saddled for thirty men, for two men and the boys can guard the camp, and when our patrol of riders come up we can ride out and join in the attack."

"You speak as though sure of your men, Mr. Cody."

"They have never failed a comrade in time of need, sir, and never will. Did Captain Nat Starbuck know you needed help, he would come himself, though the company's orders are that he shall not risk his life, having such responsibility on his hands, and I was elected Captain of the Prairie Police, while Wild Bill is first lieutenant, and Rio Grande Rob here second lieutenant, for we have a thorough military organization of riders, and, in time of great need the stable-men form another company, the stock-tenders a third, and the settlers and miners a fourth, giving us a hundred and forty men to take the field, and the Indians know what we can do, as we once carried the war into their camps."

"See, that reinforcing band is coming on rapidly, and those in our front see them, too, for, hark, how they yell."

"They feel sure of us now," said Rob, with a smile, and he added:

"But I guess you'll get back to headquarters ranch, chief, to go out on time at noon to-morrow."

"Yes, if we beat those redskins off easily I will go on to Valley Farm to-night."

"You are surely not going to put such an extra tax upon yourself, Mr. Cody, after all you have gone through with?"

"Yes, Captain Tom, duty demands that the pouches go through, and, if I did not go, some one

else would have to, and the boys are all tired, as well as I."

"But you cannot stand such a strain."

"Wait until you have been out here a while, sir, and discovered just what we can stand," answered Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

Just then there came a crashing volley of rifles from across the stream that startled Indians and pale-faces alike.

Back beyond the sandy bottom several hundred yards were the heavily wooded cliffs, and from the foliage had burst forth flame and smoke from two dozen rifles.

They had aimed down upon the Indians crouching behind rocks, scrub willows, and in holes they had dug at night, and who had been constantly dropping shot into the wagon train camp, killing a child, a woman, a boy, wounding several others, and now and then a horse.

Good shots with the rifle were posted on the hill, hidden by rocks and watching them, or the death rate would have been far more.

There were all of two score of these sharpshooting braves, who had crossed the river by night at the ford and taken up their positions.

Then the main force was encamped on the neck of land facing the hill, and this force there was over a hundred, with as many more a few miles away, coming to their aid.

Though the people of the wagon train had suffered, the dead redskins and ponies lying on the neck of land and hill slope told how very much more the Indians had been the losers.

It was upon the sharpshooters on the flat across the stream that the rifles on the cliffs had been aimed.

From the rear the Indians had no shelter, and many a brave never rose from his position.

Others in dire alarm, sprang up and rushed for the ford, leaving their ponies staked out back under the cliff.

But, as they reached the willows, other shots were heard, and Buffalo Bill cried:

"Wild Bill is on hand! I know his way of working, and he is well backed. Come, men, to your saddles, for we are wanted, too!"

The Indians facing the Horseshoe Hill seemed surprised at the turn of affairs.

The shots from the cliffs across the stream told them that they had foes there, that reinforcements

had come also for the palefaces, arriving before their own.

They had guessed at about the number, from the shots, and were glad to feel that they were not strong enough to venture across the ford and attack them.

They were maddened at the loss that volley had brought upon their comrades and the shots in the willows by the ford, to which the braves across the stream had run, showed that there were more pale-faces coming.

But how many more?

The chiefs hastily consulted, looked longingly for their own reinforcements, yet three miles away, and began to form for battle to try and hold their position until help came also for them.

But just then they saw thirty horsemen, led by Buffalo Bill, and with his own riders close at his back, coming out of the wagon train camp to attack them.

They felt that they were in a tight place, but formed to fight, and stand their ground until help came.

But ere a shot was fired, there was heard the well-known war cry of the Prairie Police, and coming over the bank from the ford was a band of horsemen.

At their head rode Wild Bill, and following in close order were thirty pony riders.

They saw the Indians, too, and were riding directly toward them.

"Halt! Aim well with your rifles——"

"Fire!" cried Buffalo Bill, and his band sent death into the Indian ranks, while Wild Bill followed the same tactics, and also poured a deadly rifle volley upon their red enemy.

"Charge them now, and use revolvers!"

Buffalo Bill had commanded, and away his band rushed.

"Charge with revolvers!" echoed Wild Bill, and the war cries of the two bands mingled together.

Glancing pleadingly toward their yet distant comrades, yet longing for revenge, scalps, and booty, hoping yet to win the day, could they hold out until their reinforcements came, the brave warriors still stood their ground and poured a return fire with rifles and bows and arrows upon the two bodies of horsemen rushing upon them as they stood at bay in the timber.

But as their fire did not do the execution hoped for, and the charging palefaces came on, their

revolvers began to rattle, though they cast despairing glances toward the longed-for reinforcements, wavered, and then broke in wild flight.

Yet as they ran, it was but a temporary act, for they hoped to rally upon their coming comrades, now seen to be fully two hundred in number.

CHAPTER XII.

BUFFALO BILL'S RIVAL.

"About five to one," said Buffalo Bill, as Wild Bill came up and joined the train people with his band of Prairie Police.

"Yes, more, Buffalo Bill, but there are just sixty other fine fellows coming, for the Stable Boys' Guard and the Settlers' Rangers are now about up to the ford, so form your plans, knowing what backing you have," answered Wild Bill.

"Good! the Overland has turned out in force, and we can give those redskins a lesson to remember.

"It is getting dark now, so I will advance in line, firing with rifles as we do so.

"You command the right, Wild Bill; Captain Tom, you take the left, and I will lead the center.

"Forward, march!"

The men formed rapidly and well, and advanced at the word.

The temporary halt, as the bands met, gave them a rest and a chance to realize their force, and knowing that they had reinforcements coming, which the redskins did not suspect, the men felt confident in spite of the odds against them.

As they advanced in the gathering twilight, they saw that the Indians had formed just on a rise and with timber behind them.

There was a hill there several hundred yards in width, up which the palefaces would have to advance, and this gave their foes a very advantageous position.

With the coming aid in their rear, Buffalo Bill, when he took in the situation of strength the Indians had, acted with the wisdom of a born commander, he halted his little force, and ordered Wild Bill to take twelve men and go to the right to flank the position, while Rio Grande Rob with twelve more men went flanking on the left.

This left him to hold the center with a trifle over forty men, and they at once began to advance very slowly, firing as they did so.

A courier had also been dispatched to the rear to hurry up the reinforcements, the gathering darkness concealing his going, as it did also the movements of the flanking parties.

The redskins returned the fire with rifles and their bows and arrows, but their weapons were not of the range of their paleface foes, and only about every other one of the redskins was armed with firearms.

Presently a messenger came up and informed Buffalo Bill that the Stable Boys' Guard and Settlers' Rangers were close at hand, sixty-five in number, while a band of stocktenders, twenty in all, under command of Velvet Dick, were on the way.

The newcomers were all under the command of Bradshaw, the assistant of Captain Nat Starbuck at headquarters, and they also had two six-pounder cannon along.

Feeling that he had now about a hundred and fifty men with him, Buffalo Bill at once determined to send one gun on each flank, to support Wild Bill and Rio Grande Rob, and a dozen men with each one, so the flanking parties would be in good force, and wait until they got into good position and open fire with the six-pounders, when he would charge the Indians with his entire force then and there, leaving the stocktenders to come up as a reserve.

He had just arranged his plans when Burke Bradshaw dashed up and cried:

"Here I am, and what force is here, for I must know just what men I have to handle."

"Pardon me, Mr. Bradshaw, but I have my Prairie Police under me, and the men of the wagon train, and I have arranged my plan of action," said Buffalo Bill.

"Your plan of action?"

"Yes, sir."

"But I command this force."

"By what authority?"

"Captain Starbuck sent me here with this force."

"Very well. I yield my authority, sir, and report for orders."

A perfect yell greeted this announcement of Buffalo Bill, with cries of:

"No! no! no!"

"You are to command!"

"We will not move except under your command, Buffalo Bill!"

Buffalo Bill was silent and Bradshaw said:

"Silence! I command here! Buffalo Bill, you have no right to incite the men against my authority."

"See here, Burke Bradshaw," and Buffalo Bill wheeled hotly toward the man he addressed.

"I yielded my authority without a word, and you shall not accuse me of a charge of which I am innocent. Take command, sir, and as this is no time for quarreling among ourselves, I will do all I can to aid you."

"No, no, no!"

"We will not move an inch!"

"He never saw an Indian outside of a circus!"

"He is a clerk!"

And numerous were the cries raised by the men.

"Silence, men! If you cause trouble now, we may be run over by the redskins, and let me tell you that two small bands of your comrades are now flanking them, and without your aid will be wiped out, while back yonder on the Horseshoe Hill many women and children depend upon you to defend them. Obey Mr. Bradshaw, men!"

But these words of Buffalo Bill met with a flat refusal from the men, one and all.

The stable men refused to budge, the settlers and miners said they would not serve under a man who did not know an Indian from a cigar sign, and the train people flatly decided that they would return to their camp and defend it as best they could, Captain Tom remarking:

"I do not know you, sir, but you are acting most unwisely to put yourself forward to command the men who all repudiate you, while to a man we will follow Buffalo Bill to death, if need be."

The stock rangers had, meanwhile come quietly up, and understanding the situation, Velvet Dick said, firmly:

"We follow no man's lead but Buffalo Bill's, and if he refuses the command, there are Wild Bill and Rio Grande Rob to fall back on."

This decision of Velvet Dick expressed the universal wish of the men, pony riders, settlers, miners, stable boys and stock tenders, and Burke Bradshaw would have been a fool to have further urged against it.

Seeing that he was not wanted as commander, he tried to surrender with as good grace as was possible, and said:

"You men don't seem to know that I once fought

Indians out on the frontier, and naturally am better fitted to command in a battle than a pony rider.

"I was only anxious to do all I could to save the Overland Company's men and horses, interested as I was in it; but take command, Cody, and be careful, for a mistake on your part may cost the lives of all of us."

"Very true, Bradshaw, and it is the great responsibility resting upon the one in command that makes me more than anxious to have some one else shoulder it, though as I am justly the commander, as captain of the Prairie Police and the men seem to wish me to resume control, I will do so."

Then, turning to the one in charge of the guns, he directed him to send a gun on each flank, with a dozen men accompanying it, and go quickly to the support of Wild Bill and the Texan.

"Get into position as quickly as possible, and open fire, the guns on the right firing first, and that will be the signal for us to charge."

"Fire several shells, and by that time we will be upon the redskins, if your guns have not already stampeded them, for they do not suspect any being here, or that we have been largely reinforced."

Finding that the palefaces still halted in the vale, just out of range of their fire, the Indians became emboldened.

There was one who was urging them on, and that one was the traitor guide, Keno Cain.

He had his glass with him, and he had counted the men coming with Wild Bill.

Surprised at their arrival, he yet had looked for no more.

His desire was to get possession of the wagon train, and the halting of the whites gave him a chance for action, and he proposed to the chief that he should take fifty braves, and, making a flank movement to the left, go back and capture the unprotected train, while there would yet be Indians enough left to give battle to their armed foes in front and perhaps defeat them by a bold rush at the proper moment.

The chief decided that this was just what should be done, and so the fifty picked warriors were told to accompany their paleface leader.

They started all right, moving off to their left which was the right of the paleface line, and when Wild Bill had gained position on the rise, being joined by the six-pounder and its support, and w

about to open fire toward the main force of redskins, suddenly the command was given to wait a minute.

The keen eyes of Wild Bill had caught sight of a dark column of horsemen moving straight toward his position, and instantly the gun was sighted upon them and the order given to fire, a score of rifles flashing with the cannon, for they were within easy range of the smaller arms.

The shell went true and burst with a loud report and red glare right in the midst of the Indian horsemen, who had not seen their foes against the little fringe of timber, nor dreamed of danger.

Hardly had Wild Bill's signal gun fired when there came a crash from half a mile away on the left, and the shell from the other gun burst among the warriors of the main force.

At the same time a long line of flame shot forth from down in the mole, and then, with wild war cries, Buffalo Bill and the main force charged up the rise upon their foes.

The redskins were startled by the first gun on their left, amazed at the second one on their right, and, with the deadly volley in their front, the charging men three quarters and the continued bursting of shells, had all the fight taken out of them and in wild terror, turned and fled.

CHAPTER XIII.

WILD BILL'S WAGER.

That Buffalo Bill's plan was a good one and had been thoroughly well executed all the men under him admitted, except one.

That one was Burke Bradshaw, who, when the retreat was ordered, found himself with Captain Tom, whom he said:

"You are with the train, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"My name is Bradshaw, and I am, though I may say manager, at the headquarters ranch, I represent the company, and I would be glad to give you advice about settling in this country."

"Thank you, sir; but I shall be guided by my friend, Captain Nat Starbuck, and——"

"What! Are you Nat Starbuck's cousin?"

"Yes, sir, and my name is Starbuck—Thomas Starbuck."

"Indeed! I am glad to meet you. And you are one of the settlers?"

"They are with me, for they came because I did, and I am glad to learn from Mr. Cody that the country about the ranch is just the place for homes."

"Well, I should say other points were better, not so near the ranch."

"There is safety in numbers, sir, and our addition to those about the ranch, Buffalo Bill says, will have a very wholesome effect upon the Mormons, the Indians and the outlaws."

"Buffalo Bill is a fool, and knows nothing about it."

"I have found him anything but a fool, sir."

"He is only a scout and the men elected him captain of the patrol because he—he——"

"Deserved it, eh?"

"No; there are far better men for the place; but he has had some lucky escapes, and it has turned his head, and I fear that after his luck to-night there will be no living in the same camp with him."

"You certainly do not call his victory to-night luck?"

"Nothing else. You see, you don't understand as we do out here about such things."

"I understand that he turned my train back when it was being led into a trap by a traitor guide. He made the guide a prisoner, and led us to where we made a successful defense against three attacks of the redskins. He risked his life to bring us aid, and brought it, and to-night he won a splendid victory."

"Yes, Mr. Bradshaw, I understand Buffalo Bill, as I also understand that, for some reason, you do not like him, and disliking a man, it is hard to see his virtues."

Burke Bradshaw bit his lips and was silent for a moment.

Then he asked:

"You say your guide was a traitor?"

"Yes, he was."

"What was his name?"

"Keno Cain."

"Ah! there was a man of that name hanged at the ranch some months ago."

"So Buffalo Bill told me."

"He was said to be the Danite captain known as Red Hand."

"Buffalo Bill said our guide was the very double of the man that was hanged."

"Where is he now?"

"He escaped."

"Escaped?"

"Yes."

"Where and how?"

"Buffalo Bill bound him, and he was put in the rear of one of the wagons. On our turning back, when the Indians were pursuing us, bound as he was, he worked his way out of the wagon, and, falling in the trail, the Indians picked him up."

"Did the fall hurt him?"

"Not seriously, for I saw him afterwards among the redskins who attacked us, and in the flight of them before us this evening."

"Well, I suppose he will turn renegade and live with the Indians now, giving us no end of trouble, but there has been a great blunder made by some one at the ranch in hanging the wrong man."

"Well, whoever was hanged deserved it, from all accounts, and my guide also richly deserved it; but I am very sorry he escaped, though Buffalo Bill seemed determined to recapture him to-night."

"He can never do it."

"Well, I feel that he may, for all I have seen that wonderful man undertake yet, he has carried out."

"Bah! he was born for luck, and that is all."

"Well, Buffalo Bill caught sight of the guide to-night, when he rallied the Indians for a minute, for he saw him by the light of the flashing revolvers, and he told me then that he would make the effort of his life to recapture him."

"A boast he knew he could not make good, for Buffalo Bill can never capture that man."

"I've got money that says he will, Mr. Bradshaw," said a voice behind them, and Wild Bill rode up alongside.

"You heard what Buffalo Bill boasted he could do?"

"Call it threat, boast, or what you will, I'll bet if Buffalo Bill goes off on the special duty of catching that man, he will either kill or capture him, and my money talks."

"Name your sum."

"One hundred."

"Good! I'll take the bet."

"Captain Starbuck, here, will hold the stakes, so we will go to yonder camp-fire and count out the money," and Wild Bill pointed to a fire some of the men had built to light up the field, for they were busy collecting the wounded and the dead, for half a dozen brave fellows had fallen, never to rise again, and a score or more men were more or less seriously wounded.

The men were dropping back from the pursuit four and five at a time, and were halting upon the field as they came, and riding up to the fire.

Burke Bradshaw and Wild Bill counted out their money and gave it to Captain Tom to hold for them.

In an hour the men had all come in, with one exception—Buffalo Bill, and none of the men had seen

him since he dashed ahead in hot pursuit of the flying redskins.

The chief of the Prairie Police had been on the watch for the traitor guide during the entire fight, as his men said he "had it in for him."

He wished to learn the true story of that hanging where the man whom, as he believed, he had seen hanged, could come to life again.

Then, too, Buffalo Bill was most anxious to punish the man for his treachery to the train of Captain Starbuck, which meant such inhuman treatment to the women and children of the train, not to speak of the butchery of the men.

When he thought of Ada Starbuck and the others the chief of the patrol of prairie men grew merciless.

He had noticed in the fight that the traitor guide rode a large white horse, and with his eye riveted upon the animal and his rider, Buffalo Bill saw the Keno's desire when he saw the Indians stampeded would be to save himself.

He rightly guessed that the traitor would fear to go with the Indians, after such a fearful defeat, they had met with, for they would be very bitter perhaps visit upon him their revenge for the crushing disaster.

So the white horse was seen to dash off alone, and Buffalo Bill was hot on his trail.

The Mounted Prairie Police chief had fitted himself up again from the wardrobe of Captain Tom, and having left his rifle, horse and other traps in the camp when he went off on his daring rescue he had therefore, found them safe, while he had been supplied with a pair of revolvers and a knife.

He then felt like himself once more, for his bruises and bleeding feet and other slight injuries troubled him but little, having been well cared for by Captain Tom.

He kept the white horse in sight, and he watched like a hawk to see when the guide halted, so that he might do the same and not be discovered.

The chase continued for miles, the man bearing away from the Indian country until at last he came to an open valley which Buffalo Bill knew was on the border of what was known to bordermen as Death Desert.

It was so called as settlers who had gone there found only death at the end of their trail, and Indians had also perished in the barren country, there was no water there that was known.

Though the country had in it hills, valleys, canyons with heavy timber, there was no fertile ground—at least, none known to Indians, where grass and water could be found.

But Buffalo Bill when on a trail one day had come upon a band of elk, and they were coming out of the Death Desert.

To him this meant that there were water and grass to be found there, and he at once took the trail

the animals, rode for hours along it until it neared the Grand Canyon country, and, at last, in the wildest recesses there he found a stream of water in the head of a canyon, and saw that it lost itself in the sands a mile away.

But in that canyon, at its head, and as far as the stream ran there was the finest grass, and it was seen to be a retreat for wild animals.

Several times had the chief of Prairie Police visited the place for a hunt, once with Wild Bill and again with Rio Grande Rob.

When the traitor guide turned into this valley, Buffalo Bill supposed that he might know the secret of this fertile spot in the Death Desert, and be going there; but before he discovered if such was the case the white horse came to a halt, and the chief at once took refuge among a group of rocks overgrown with scrub pines.

He knew he could not be seen there and was ready for any move.

But the traitor guide suddenly turned his horse and came back—over the trail toward him.

CHAPTER XIV.

BENT ON MISCHIEF.

After the severe battle with the Indians, as nothing could be done in the way of following the trail of Buffalo Bill, the men gathered up the wounded and the dead and were ready to carry all to a camp on the stream, where it was decided that the whole force could remain for the night.

The slain horses had been stripped of their trappings, and as all was prepared for the move, it was hoped that Buffalo Bill, unable to follow the fugitive guide, would come in.

In his absence, however, Burke Bradshaw sought to assume command, but Wild Bill was not a man to stand the slightest nonsense, and hearing him giving orders, he went up to him and said, in his drawling way:

"See here, Bradshaw, in the absence of Buffalo Bill, I command this outfit, and should I drop dead with heart disease, then Rio Grande Rob plays a full hand at the commanding business, so just give no more orders here unless they come from me."

"Why is not Buffalo Bill here to take command, then?"

"He's off winning the money I bet you he would win," was the reply, and Wild Bill turned away.

But at heart he was really anxious about the absence of Buffalo Bill, and went from man to man to learn who had been the last one to see him.

Having gleaned the information that he had been seen at the right of the line, charging after an Indian who bore a chief's war bonnet, Wild Bill decided to take a party of his men and ride over that part of the field.

"If they have captured him, I will take the whole command on their trail," he said, in his decided way.

Telling the men to build fires and get what rest they

could, he started out on the search for his devoted pard, for whom he felt an almost fatherly regard, though he was only about six years the senior of Buffalo Bill.

Still he had known Buffalo Bill since he was only ten years of age, and had begun his career as a mounted messenger on the Santa Fe trail from wagon trail to wagon trail.

With the horses in a canter, and every man on the watch, Wild Bill rode first to the spot where he had heard that his pard had last been seen.

He had the man along who had been the last one to see him from all accounts, and from there on he would stretch his men out in a line and follow on over the trail of flight, so that if dead or wounded Buffalo Bill would be found.

He felt no anxiety for the command left behind, or the wagon train.

They would be all right, and he had called Rio Grande Rob to one side before going, and told him that he was to take command.

"In case," he added, "that Burke Bradshaw tries to usurp your power, as he did Buffalo Bill's and mine, put him under arrest at once, and bind and gag him if need be, for the fellow is trying to run the ranch and all else, and, if I am not mistaken, Captain Nat Starbuck will have to jump on him hard before long."

"I'll take care of him," was Rob's quiet comment, and it meant a great deal from him.

So Wild Bill and his little band rode away in search of Buffalo Bill, dead or alive, and they had hardly gotten out of sight before Burke Bradshaw showed again that he considered himself in charge.

"Come, men, there is no need of our remaining among these rocks, without blankets and food, so we will go to the Horseshoe Hill and camp, for, after saving them from massacre, the train people ought to be only too glad to feed and entertain us."

"I assure you that they will, sir," said Captain Tom, quickly.

The men had stripped for the fight, so their extra blankets and all the provisions had gone to Horseshoe Hill on the pack animals after crossing the ford, Buffalo Bill's negro man-of-all-work being in charge.

The victory being won, the men were only too willing to go and get a good supper, and then turn in for a rest for the balance of the night, for they were very tired, so they were very quick to obey the command of Burke Bradshaw, as both Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill were gone.

But suddenly Rio Grande Rob stepped forward and said:

"Hold on, men! You get your orders from me, for I was left in command."

"And who gave you the right to command here above me?" shouted Burke Bradshaw.

"Wild Bill did."

"Bah! he has no right to say who shall command in his absence."

"See here, Burke Bradshaw, Buffalo Bill is the authorized captain at the post, Wild Bill is his first lieutenant, and I am the next in rank, and I was left in command."

"If Velvet Dick desires to take his stock-tenders away, and Hading to call off his settlers and miners, Birney the stable men, and Captain Tom here his train

people, they are at liberty to do so, but the pony riders remain here, and, as I understand it, the force is united, and all are under the same command.

"You are only the clerk of Captain Starbuck, and have no authority out of the ranch office, so I advise you not to make trouble for yourself."

He spoke with the utmost coolness, and the men at once saw that he was right, and Velvet Dick said:

"We stand by you, Rob, for you command here."

"That's the talk—me, too!" called out Birney.

"You bet we are in it to stay, Rio Rob," cried Hading.

"I am under your command, sir; no one else has authority here," firmly added Captain Tom.

"By Heaven! you are a lot of fools, and you, sir, an ingrate, after my bringing the men to save you. I wash my hands of all responsibility and leave you!" shouted Burke Bradshaw.

"You will remain in this camp, Bradshaw," said Rio Grande Rob, firmly.

At the calmly uttered words, Burke Bradshaw, who had his foot in his stirrup to mount and leave camp, took it out, wheeled and confronted the man who dared to give him such an order.

"Did I understand aright, or did my ears deceive me?"

"If you have brains enough to grasp what I said, you should have understood me, and I have not heard you complain that your hearing was bad."

"By Heaven, but I believe you intend to insult me!"

"No, I intend to convince you that I command here, and that you must obey me."

"I obey you!"

"Come, Bradshaw, I wish no more argument. Stake your horse out and remain in camp."

"Not by your order, sir."

"Yes, by my order."

"Obey me!" and the revolver of the Texan covered the heart of Burke Bradshaw by a movement so rapid that no one seemed to know how it was done.

Burke Bradshaw had beyond doubt not dreamed that he would go so far.

He had expected to bluff him.

Failing to awe either Buffalo Bill or Wild Bill into giving him the command, which he so longed for, he was sure that Rio Grande Rob would not dare confront him as they had done.

He knew the Texan well by name, and as he saw his face in the firelight, he realized that he was not one to trifle with.

He was covered, so dared not move.

Yet he did not wish to back down, to yield if he could get out of it, so he called out:

"I appeal to you, gentlemen, the captain of the different squads here, if this man here has a right to threaten my life."

Velvet Dick was one who never dodged an issue, and he replied:

"If you appeal to me, as one of the leaders of a squad, I will say frankly that you have been shown mercy tonight that, in my humble opinion, you did not deserve, for in this country a man must obey or take the consequences."

A cheer greeted these words, but as a silence followed, and Bradshaw's eyes rested upon Captain Tom, the latter seemed to feel that he wished his opinion, and so said:

"I think, sir, you have no right to bring your authority in conflict with those who appear to have the right to command."

Another cheer greeted this opinion.

But Bradshaw did not yield, and turned to Hading who said, abruptly:

"Obey, man, and don't make a fool of yourself."

But he seemed not yet convinced, though the laughter following Hading's remark cut him deeply.

So he turned to Birney, while one of the pony riders called out:

"Watch him, for he's only waiting to catch you off your guard and plug you, Rob!"

"Do you want me to tell you what I think?" said Birney, the captain of the Stable Boys' Rangers.

"Yes, I want to know what fools you all can be," was the sneering reply.

"Well, if I had been Buffalo Bill, in the first place, I would have shot you, and in the next place, when you opposed Wild Bill I'd have plugged you ag'in; and I'm only sorry, as you escaped them, that Rio Rob didn't kill yer for mutiny, and stand his trial at the post, with every mother's son of us here as witnesses in his favor and only your own body to show you was the victim of too much freshness. There you have an honest opinion from an honest man."

The yells of applause and laughter that greeted this opinion showed even a man of Burke Bradshaw's conceit that he was going too far, and he at once said:

"Rio Grande Rob, I yield to the crowd against me, but not to you, and remain in camp. Birney, stake your horse out until I am ready for him."

"You will yield to me, Bradshaw, and stake your own horse out, for you are not at the post now, where the stable-men have to care for your horse."

"I will remain in camp, and it is his work to care for my horse—let him do it."

"I will if Rio Rob says so," said Birney.

But Burke Bradshaw had gone too far; the Texan went white with anger.

In an instant he was close to the man, and thrusting the muzzle of his revolver into his face, he shouted:

"Do as I tell you, or, by Heaven, I will kill you where you stand!"

The man turned livid and gave a quick glance around him.

But the eyes of Rio Grande Rob fascinated him, and he again looked into them.

There was only determination there to keep his word, and Burke Bradshaw said in a trembling voice:

"You shall answer for this."

"Obey!"

Then Bradshaw turned, grasped the rein of his horse and led him away, Rob following.

The horse was staked out, and then Rio Grande Rob said:

"Back to the fire, sir!"

The man obeyed.

"Give me your weapons!"

He hesitated an instant, but did as he was told.

"Bring me a lariat, Birney!"

It was brought, and, unaided, save by his revolvers to subdue the man, the Texan bound him securely, hands and feet.

Then he took Bradshaw's own knife, and, thrusting the scabbard into his mouth bound it there, completely gagging him.

"Now we will have no more orders from you while I am in command," and he had just turned away when the rapid clatter of hoofs was heard, and one of Wild Bill's men dashed up and cried:

"Mount, Rio Grande Rob, and follow me with all your force, for you are needed!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE FORTY THIEVES.

"Now I have got him," muttered Buffalo Bill, and he prepared to hold the man up, taking him alive, if possible, kill him if he was forced to do so.

He could drop him from ambush, without risk to himself, but he was determined to take the man alive if in his power—to let him be hanged.

Back came the traitor guide, and he halted within fifty feet of the scout.

Buffalo Bill was prepared to act, when he heard a sound that startled him, and it told him why Keno had turned back.

It was the sound of many hoofs.

To retreat was out of the question, then, and so the scout waited, while the sound of hoofs grew louder and louder.

"Not Indians, for these horses I hear are shod. Who are they be?" said Buffalo Bill, half aloud.

He was surprised to see that the traitor guide still remained near, and as he wondered the man gave a long, loud, shrill whistle, repeated it, and then there were two sharp, short blasts.

It was a signal, and was answered from among the horsemen by three sharp blasts.

"He knows them now; but who are they?" said Cody.

Voices were now heard, the horsemen came forward at a run and halted near the man on the white horse, who called out, with an oath:

"You have come too late, for we have lost the train, which I had to get Chief Wolf Teeth and his braves to attack for me, as you delayed so, and that accursed Buffalo Bill and his Prairie Police defeated the whole gang."

"Where in Hades were you, Devil Dan, and why did you not meet me when I sent orders?"

"I tried to do so, captain, but there were cavalrymen from Wingate hot on our trail, and I couldn't come, hard as we tried to do it, for we had to lie hid in our retreat; but is there game up?"

"Yes, played and lost, and the reds running to their villages while we have Buffalo Bill after us, I fear; but

it's lucky I met you, for I need company just now," and the man laughed bitterly, while Buffalo Bill, overhearing all, muttered:

"The Forty Thieves, and that man Keno is their chief—Captain Cruel."

It was a joyous surprise to the chief of the Prairie Police, yet one that caused him anxiety a moment after, for he was in hiding, alone and in danger of discovery.

But he would watch, wait and take matters as they came.

He counted the men as well as he could in a group, and made out that there were all of two dozen of them.

They had several pack horses along, and were doubtless ready for a raid upon some settlement, now that they had lost the Starbuck wagon train.

It flashed through the mind of the scout that Captain Cruel, known also as Keno, the Guide, had gone further east, gotten the contract to lead the wagon train to the far West and had arranged his plans with his cutthroat gang to guide the poor people into an ambush.

But the cavalry from the fort had delayed the arrival of the Forty Thieves at the appointed place on time, and, friendly with the Indians, because he was an outlaw and made war against his own people, Keno had been forced to call upon Chief Wolf Teeth, then hunting with his braves in the valleys.

But the discovery of the wagon trail by Buffalo Bill, when trying to find out traces of these very outlaws, had thwarted the traitor guide.

Where the retreat of the band was, Buffalo Bill hoped now he would find out, for, though alone, he meant to track the men, if he did not have to fly for his life.

He had written a line and stuck it on a stick in his trail, merely saying that he was tracking Keno and telling his men to follow.

At dawn he knew the men would be on his trail, though how many he did not know.

Silent as a statue, he sat on his horse awaiting to learn more, while the outlaws talked.

He heard much said that would prove useful to him, and Keno, the Guide, had remarked that he had fled from the Indians, but that the Prairie Police would doubtless think he had gone with the redskins.

"I shot at that devilish Buffalo Bill a dozen times, but did not touch him; he certainly carries a charmed life; but we will go into camp here, for no one is on my trail, and at daylight we will strike along the line of the Overland Trail and hit Valley Farm headquarters and the Prairie Police Ranch, for we will get big booty, and I happen to know that Nat Starbuck has got the quarterly pay for his men, and that means thousands in cash."

Buffalo Bill was in a quandary.

He must prevent the raid along the Overland Trail in the absence of the men, and to do so there was but one thing to do.

Going into camp there would at once discover his presence, and the scout quickly decided that they should know who he was.

"Their horses are tired, mine is fairly fresh, and if they believe they can capture me they will follow me."

"The Prairiemen will be on my trail in the morning, and I'll write a line, as well as I can and leave it here."

"Then I'll introduce myself to those fellows, and if all goes as I plan, I'll lead them into a trap from which there is no escape."

He took from his pocket a large sheet of paper and a pencil, dismounted and placing the sheet on his saddle wrote in the darkness by guesswork:

"Followed Keno—he is Captain Cruel—met his gang of Forty Thieves here, and I heard all said.

"I make myself known and let them follow me as a decoy.

"Lead them into trap in Death Desert—follow trail, for Wild Bill or Rob knows where.

"Will decoy them there and hold until you come. I chance this paper—

"B. B."

This paper was stuck in a stick where the Prairie Police would find it, for Buffalo Bill knew what his men would do in searching a trail.

Then he remounted, and slowly moved off among the rocks until he reached the other side.

Like a trumpet his voice rang out:

"Ho, Keno, if you want me take me, for I am alone!"

The words fell upon the Forty Thieves like a cannon-shot.

But into view, at long rifle range as seen in the darkness, dashed Buffalo Bill, and off he sped like a deer.

"Buffalo Bill! He has tracked me here.

"A thousand dollars to the man who captures him—the price on his head besides!"

It was Captain Cruel's voice, and the men uttered a shout of joy and started in pursuit.

No one fired, for each one wanted to kill or capture the chief of the Prairie Police, and win that double price on his head.

Away they swept, and the outlaw leader was in the advance, while his men followed according to the speed of their horses.

And Buffalo Bill, silent and determined, rode on out of rifle range towards the Death Desert.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DECOY IN DEATH DESERT.

Buffalo Bill was well pleased with two things, as he boldly gave his defiant war cry that told who he was, and that the whole force of the Forty Thieves had come in pursuit.

He set off in a way to attract, not avoid their attention, and his horse was surely the superior of any animal ridden by the outlaws.

The scout readily understood why the outlaws did not fire upon him, as their desire was to take him alive.

Fortunately, the position taken by the scout gave the idea that the outlaws would not follow him into the Death Desert, while, if he went back toward the scene of the fight, he would likely run upon Indian bands.

Had he gone in the opposite direction it would have led him far from his people.

So all seemed in favor of the Prairie Police captain.

As he ran along well ahead, with the whole lawless band in pursuit, he determined to see how his rifle would carry, and if he could not give the band still better reason for wishing to take him.

So he suddenly drew rein, and careful not to fire at the man on the white horse, as he was anxious to take him alive, he pulled trigger.

A horse went down, but the fate of the rider he did not know, though some of the horsemen checked up for a moment.

Keeping on again he still held his distance, and found that the pace was telling upon his horse, and certainly it must be upon those of his pursuers.

"I don't want to lose them," he muttered.

"If I can reach the canyon in time to go into hiding there, I know the very spot and I can hold it against a hundred men, for to reach me they will have to climb and only one man can come up at a time.

"It means that I must lose my horse, but I guess can get him back, and more, it means I will have to be hungry until the boys arrive.

"But I guess I can stand it for the good it will do."

So the chase went on, the daring decoy's speed coming down until his horse could only go in a slow lope.

But the pursuers' horses were able to do no more.

Down came the horsemen to a walk only, but Buffalo Bill knew that his horse could do better than that, as he had some reserve force left.

When he should come in sight of the canyon wished to decoy the band into, he would ride fast giving him a chance to reach the spot, fill his canteen at the spring and climb to his retreat before the others got there.

As the sun rose he began to count his pursuers:

"Twenty-seven of them; big odds, but I don't mind them with the chances in my favor once I reach the canyon," he said, and, soon after, he began slowly to quicken his pace.

He felt sure that some of the men must know there was water and grass in the canyon, as they would not even to take him, have gone that far in the desert with worn-out and hungry horses.

As for themselves, the half dozen pack animals that had along proved that they had provisions in plenty.

The pursuers were stretched out for several miles over the desert, the pack horses coming along far in the rear and with apparent effort.

As he increased his pace, the others tried to do so, but their horses were not equal to it, and Buffalo Bill rode a slow lope.

He reached the cliff, entered the canyon and rode at the full speed of his horse the mile and a half up to the further end, where the stream began and the grass was to be found.

He shot an antelope that dashed by him and carried him along, stopped at the spring and took a long drink, filled his canteen and turned his splendid horse loose.

Then he gathered some dry brush for firewood, and some choice bits of meat from the antelope, and with his blankets and weapons began to climb the cliff.

He had reached a dizzy height when he saw his pursuers come in sight, and they appeared to be afraid of a shot.

But he went up higher still, reached a narrow shelf and had to crawl along it to a cave in the cliff some feet in diameter.

He had just reached it when Keno, the traitor guide, saw him, and believing he was making his escape, ordered all of his men to fire.

The bullets flattened against the cliff, but Buffalo Bill was safe.

"Ho, Captain Cruel, if you wish to get me, you will have to starve me out, for I've come to the end of my rope, can't go any further; but I've got some food, so am good for a few days."

They all heard every word he uttered, and the outlaw chief replied:

"And I'll starve you out, Buffalo Bill, for I know you've only got parts of the antelope you killed, and you may have a canteen of water.

"One of my men who knows this canyon says you cannot escape, and we can wait and build up our horses and ourselves, for we have plenty of food, and game comes in plenty."

"Quit talking and let me go to sleep," answered Buffalo Bill.

But instead he lighted a small fire of brush and broiled one of his antelope steaks.

Then he spread his blankets and lay down to rest, sleeping with one eye open.

The outlaws supposed he would go to sleep at once after eating and have no fear of them, so three of them started to climb the cliff as he had done; while others were on the watch that he did not come out of the cave and fire on them.

A sense of danger awakened the scout when the three men had reached the spot where they had to crawl along the narrow ledge.

He saw them the moment his eyes opened, quickly leveled his revolver, pulled the trigger once, twice, and two were dead ere they fell from the cliff, while the third in his flight sprang off from the dizzy height, and Cody did not fire upon him.

A shower of bullets in retaliation were fired into the cave, but the scout had already sprang to cover and called out:

"You want me so bad, Keno, why don't you come after me?"

But the men had retreated to shelter, fearing the scout would fire on them.

So the day passed, and, before sunset, Buffalo Bill again lighted his fire and cooked a steak, which, with a few swallows of water, were his supper.

He had looked far out over the west, in hopes of seeing aid coming, but no rescuers were in sight, and so he dampened the brush so that it would make a smoke as a signal to be seen far off.

"I guess if Wild Bill or Rio Grande Rob come, they will be careful not to appear in sight in daylight.

"I'll get a good rest to-night, for I am sure those fellows will not try the cliff again, but I'll make sure

and put my lariat there with a rock on the end for them to knock off and that will rouse me."

So he set his trap and then went to sleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE END OF THE TRAIL.

Wild Bill had but one aim in view, and that was to find Buffalo Bill.

He had not gone far with his small force, when he realized that as Buffalo Bill had pursued Keno the Guide, he could be led into an ambush by him, as there must be a number of bands of redskins about.

This decided him to at once send for Rio Grande Rob, and the rest of the Prairie Police.

A courier was therefore sent at once with orders for the Texan.

Within an hour Rio Grande Rob and his men joined Wild Bill and the night trail was begun to track Buffalo Bill.

Before leaving, Rio Grande Rob gave orders that Bradshaw was to return with the stock tenders, stable men and the pony riders who must return to duty, and the man was to be reported by Velvet Dick as a prisoner.

The Texan also took along their provisions and ammunition to go prepared for a long trail, if need be.

It was nearly dawn when the Prairie Police, after a few hours' rest, mounted their horses and started upon the trail of their chief.

They were fairly well rested, as were also their horses.

They soon picked up the trail of the two horses, the one ridden by Keno Cain and the other by Cody.

It was the middle of the forenoon before they halted for breakfast, and it was just at the point where Buffalo Bill had taken refuge in the timber and rocks.

At once they saw the tracks of the Forty Thieves and Wild Bill said:

"The horses are shod—they are Captain Cruel's gang, and Heaven grant Buffalo Bill did not run upon them."

Every man was set to work then looking for trails and signs, save the two men who were to cook the late breakfast.

And it took just such men to find signs and read them as an open book.

Cody's note was found. It made all plain that there was any doubt about.

"He's a good one, is that same Bill, for he's taken big chances to decoy those varmints into Death Desert, trusting for us to follow.

"Now, I know the canyon, as you do, also, Rob, and there is no chance of his escape, and we'll catch the outlaws there like rats in a trap.

"But we'll go slow, so as not to get in sight by daylight from the cliff, and surprise them at dawn to-morrow. What do you say, Rio Grande Rob?"

"Couldn't be better, and just what Chief Cody would have us do; but I suggest that we cook our supper now, so as not to have to build a fire on the desert, for fires are such telltales, you know, and we can all gather a

bundle of grass to take along, for our horses, and fill everything with water here, so as to give the animals a few swallows to-night, for water is a precious thing from here to the canyon."

"We'll do it," said Wild Bill, and his orders were strictly carried out.

The men had a hearty meal, then mounted, and at a steady pace set out across the Death Desert.

They only halted for short rests until sunset, and then they all saw the smoke on the distant cliffs.

"They are there, and I'll bet ten to one that Buffalo Bill has made that fire as a signal, if he had to burn his blankets, for there is no wood on that cliff," and Wild Bill seemed disappointed that he could get no one to take his bet.

After a short rest they rode on and kept up a steady pace for hours.

Then they halted for food and to give their horses the grass and a few swallows of water, while they caught a couple of hours' sleep.

It was just growing dawn when they drew near the outlaws to the canyon, and Rio Grande Rob and Velvet Dick went forward on foot.

There was no guard there, but the horses were halted in the canyon, and left with a guard, and the men then crept forward on foot.

They soon saw the outlaws lying down near the spring, and just as day dawned clearly, the Prairie Police were in position, and almost as one rifle came a volley.

It was a complete surprise, and at once became a hot fight, and, for once, Buffalo Bill was not in it.

Aroused by the shots, he at once knew what had happened and gave his war cry, while he began to crawl away from the cavern and descend to join his comrades.

But his services were not needed, as the work was done, and the outlaws not slain were prisoners, and they were very few.

Among the latter was Captain Cruel—haggard, white-faced and savage.

"You've won, Cody," he said, as the scout was greeted by his men with a cheer.

"Yes, for I held a full hand of trumps, as you see here," and Buffalo Bill pointed to his Prairie Police.

"What do you intend to do with me?"

"Take you to the commandant of Wingate."

"To hang me?"

"Doubtless."

"I believe you came to this canyon which has been our death trap, just to decoy us here, knowing your men were following."

Buffalo Bill laughed and replied:

"I decoyed you to your doom, feeling very sure the Riders would strike my trail. I guess now, with the lesson the Indians have had and the wipe-out of the Forty Thieves, this country will get some rest."

"You have not caught all of us," and the outlaw seemed sorry that the words escaped his lips the moment he had spoken.

"But we will."

"Never."

"Life and freedom to the man who guides me to the den of the Forty Thieves," cried Cody.

Every prisoner spoke up, while the chief cried, quickly:

"I'll make terms with you, Cody."

"No, I do not trade with you. Men, as you all seem anxious to save your necks, I will let you draw lots."

This they agreed to, and the youngest and about the far less-vicious looking one of the band got the prize, though he alone had not volunteered to betray his comrades, until Cody forced him to draw with the others.

"Now see to the wounded men, then bury the dead, and we'll camp here until night," came the orders, for several of the Prairie Police had been killed and a few wounded.

At night the return trail was taken up and the wounded were sent to Valley Ranch, while the prisoners were escorted to the outlaw retreat which was on the way to Wingate.

"Chief Cody, I would like to speak to you and your two officers," said the young outlaw, who had won his freedom on condition that he would guide the Prairie Police to the retreat of the Forty Thieves.

Buffalo Bill called to Wild Bill and Rio Grande Rob to join him and the young outlaw.

"I wish to say before you three that I did not mean to be an outlaw, but came West to hunt gold, was unlucky and got picked up by Keno Cain, and it was either join his band or be killed.

"That's how I got into it, and I only waited a chance to get money enough to reach home, and then skip out.

"I tell you this to show you that I am not an outlaw from choice.

"I know you are wondering how that man Keno Cain could be hanged, as you thought, and yet be alive.

"It was an easy thing, when you know the trick, for the Keno Cain now here was, of course, not the one you saw hanged; you see, there were two of them, and they were twin brothers, as like as two mules, and both devils, to boot.

"They played the game of one man when it was possible or necessary for their work, fooling many; but I got on to their little game by accident, and knew it all.

"You hanged Keno Cain all right, but only one of them, the twin brother, you know, and, as I said, they both used the same name.

"This one had an ally in the Overland Company who posted him on rich freight going through, by pony rider or coach, and he heard of the Starbuck wagon train coming West and went East to become its guide.

"Now I'll give you a pointer as to who the ally is.

"Captain Nat Starbuck's trusted clerk, Burke Bradshaw, is the man, for he is a crook and a bad one, from wayback.

"I've seen him meet Keno Cain often, secretly, on a trail, and I intended, when I skipped the outlaw outfit, to go to you, Chief Cody, and tell you the truth."

It was a great surprise to Buffalo Bill and his two

comrades to learn the truth about Keno Cain, a man whom they had regarded as dead.

This surprise was increased also by learning of the double life being led by Burke Bradshaw.

Bradshaw's strange behavior could thus be accounted for when he sought to take command, and prevent the battle with the Indians and later to check the pursuit of Keno Cain.

Many things about him they now recalled, were certain proof of his guilt.

"See here, Buckley, I believe what you say about yourself, and of these two men, and if you care to remain in this country as a pony rider, I'll give you a chance," said Buffalo Bill.

"I'll gladly do it, sir, and thank you for this chance, as soon as I have guided you to the den of the Forty Thieves."

The young man earned his freedom fairly, and guided the Prairie Police to the Forty Thieves' den. Then again it was another complete surprise and wipe out, with a few more prisoners taken, who, to escape death, cried aloud for mercy.

"Now," said Cody, "the Forty Thieves are all present or accounted for."

The prisoners were taken to Wingate, and the commandant there lost no time in hanging Captain Cruel, Devil Dan, his lieutenant, and several of the most guilty of the lot, while the others were sent East as prisoners to a long term in prison.

When the Prairie Police returned to Valley Ranch, Ed Buckley, the ex-outlaw, accompanied them, for he had proposed to entrap Burke Bradshaw in a clever way.

Captain Tom Starbuck and his outfit had already reached Valley Ranch, where all had been made comfortable by Captain Nat, the Boss of the Overland, and the train people at once set to work building their homes, and staking out their land.

Burke Bradshaw had been liberated by Captain Nat when he arrived as Rob's prisoner, for he had found it hard to believe that his faithful clerk had behaved as Velvet Dick had reported he had done.

"I know, Dick, that he has worried you by his attentions to your sweet daughter, Sunbeam, and that you do not like him," said the boss.

"I confess I do not, nor does my daughter, upon whom he has forced his attentions; but, having come out here to join me after her mother's death, she is content to accept the wild life as she finds it, and puts up with much she cannot avoid. Yet I wish you to know, Captain Nat, that I only obeyed Rio Grande Rob's orders in bringing Bradshaw to you as a prisoner."

"You did right, Velvet Dick; but I am glad my Cousin Ada is here now, for she will be company for your daughter."

"They seem to be already the best of friends, sir, and Sunbeam wishes Miss Starbuck to be our guest in her cabin until her father has a home."

"I know she will be glad to do so, as my cabin is too public for a lady guest, and not as comfortable as yours."

Thus it was settled, and Ada Starbuck became the guest of Verna Deering, whom the men had nicknamed "Sunbeam," for she was of a sunshiny nature, with a kind word and a smile for every one, a fitting companion for Captain Tom's "Dandy Angel," as Ada was already known to the men of the Overland Trail.

When the Prairie Police came to Valley Ranch, they brought Ed. Buckley as a prisoner, securely bound.

This was the trick of the young ex-outlaw, who told Buffalo Bill that he could thus show Bradshaw in his true light, if they were allowed to be together, as he would pretend to have a secret message from Keno Cain to him.

As Bradshaw had already been released, Buffalo Bill told Captain Nat of the charges against him, and a plan was arranged for him to see Buckley while unknown witnesses were to hear all that was said.

The scheme worked to perfection, for, believing Buckley to be a prisoner, Bradshaw gave himself dead away, and Captain Nat and Rio Grande Rob overheard all that was said.

In that wild country his trial and sentence quickly followed, the latter being that he should be hanged for his treachery.

The sentence was carried out by order of Buffalo Bill, the Prairie Police being the executioners, and, from that day, the lawlessness on the Arizona trail was ended.

From the very first, Rio Grande Rob, whose real name was Robert Field, and who was a Texas rancher when at home, living the life of a pony rider from mere love of adventure, fell in love with Ada Starbuck, who returned his affection, and, within a year, they were married. The handsome young groom took his bride to his home in the Lone Star State, where Captain Tom accompanied them, for they would have it so.

Nor was that the only wedding in Valley Ranch, for Ed Buckley, who had shown himself a splendid fellow, after all, won as his wife, Verna Deering, Velvet Dick's pretty daughter, the "Sunbeam" of the Overland.

Not long after the grand victory won by the Prairie Police, Buffalo Bill received orders to report as chief of scouts to the Tenth Cavalry Regiment, and then commenced his wonderful and adventurous career with that gallant regiment.

THE END.

The story of Buffalo Bill's adventures with the famous Tenth Cavalry (colored) will be found in next weeks' Buffalo Bill Stories (No. 9), and will be entitled, "Buffalo Bill's Black Scouts; or, On the Trail of the Outlaw Band of Devil's Den." A Story of the Forbidden Land.

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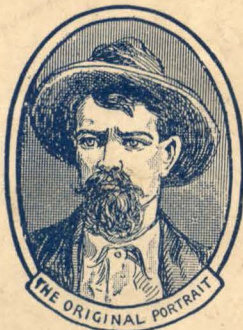
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